Hermes and Plato

Edouard Schure

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HERMES

AND

PLATO

Contents: Hermes (Mysteries of Egypt); The Sphinx; Hermes; Isis, the Initiation, the Tests; Osiris. Death & Resurrection; Vision of Hermes. Plato (Mysteries of Eleusis); Youth of Plato & the Death of Socrates; Initiation of Plato & the Platonic Philosophy; and Mysteries of Eleusis.

Edouard Schure

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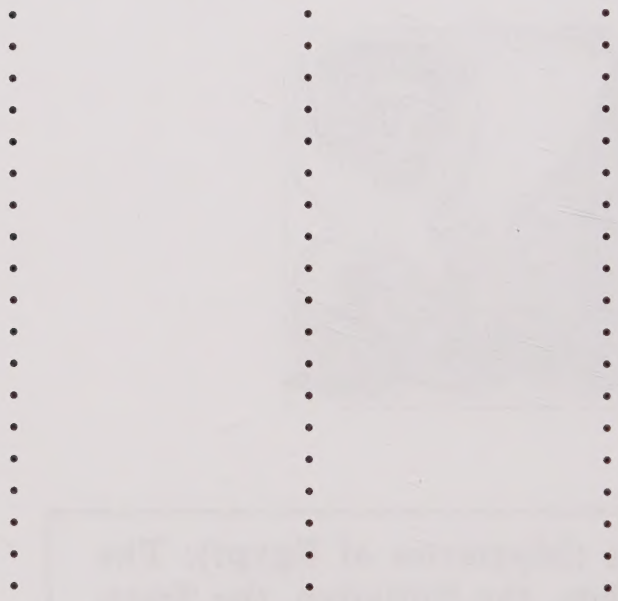

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HERMES

(THE MYSTERIES OF EGYPT)

Blind soul! Arm thyself with the torch of the Mysteries, and in the night of earth shalt thou uncover thy luminous Double, thy celestial Soul. Follow this divine guide and let him be thy Genius, for he holds the key of thy lives, both past and to come.

Appeal to the Initiates (from the *Book of the Dead*).

Listen within yourselves and look into the infinitude of Space and Time. There can be heard the songs of the Constellations, the voices of the Numbers, and the harmonies of the Spheres.

Each sun is a thought of God and each planet a mode of that thought. To know divine thought, O souls, you descend and painfully ascend the path of the seven planets and of their seven heavens.

What do the Constellations? What say the Numbers? What revolve the Spheres? O lost or saved souls, they speak, they sing, they roll . . . your destinies!

Fragment (from Hermes).

HERMES

CHAPTER I

THE SPHINX

In the ancient world, Egypt was a veritable citadel of sacred science, a school for its most illustrious prophets and a refuge for the noblest traditions of mankind. Thanks to the immense excavations and investigations of recent years, the people of Egypt are better known to us at the present time than any of the civilisations that preceded Greece; its history is revealed, written on pages of stone. In spite, however, of the fact that its monuments have been cleared of the accumulations of ages, and its hieroglyphs deciphered, we have not succeeded in penetrating to the deepest secrets of its thought, the occult teachings of its priests. This teaching, scientifically expounded in the temples and prudently veiled beneath the mysteries, shows us at a glance the soul of Egypt, the secret of its politics, and the important part it has played in the world's history.

Our historians speak in the same breath of the Pharaohs as they do of the despots of Nineveh and Babylon. To them Egypt is an absolute and conquering monarchy, like Assyria, from which it differs merely in that it has lasted a few thousand years more. Do they know that in Assyria royalty utterly crushed the priesthood to make an instrument of it, whilst in Egypt the priesthood disciplined royalty and never abdicated even at the worst times, imposing itself on the kings, driving out the despots, never ceasing to govern the nation; and all this by means of an intellectual superiority, a profound and secret wisdom which no teaching body has ever equalled in any country or at any period? I scarcely think they do, for instead of drawing innumerable conclusions from this essential fact, our historians have scarcely noticed it and appear to attach no importance whatever to it. And yet, one need be neither an archæologist nor a linguist to understand that the implacable hatred that existed between Assyria and Egypt comes from the fact that these two nations represented two opposing principles, and that the Egyptian nation was indebted for its long duration to a religious and scientific hardening process stronger than any revolution.

From the Aryan epoch right through the stormy

period following the Vedic times on to the Persian conquest and the Alexandrine epoch, that is to say, during more than five thousand years, Egypt was the stronghold of those lofty and pure doctrines, the total of which constitutes the science of principles and may be called the esoteric orthodoxy of antiquity. What if fifty dynasties succeeded one another and the Nile piled its alluvial soil over entire cities; what if the Phœnicians in turn inundated and were driven out of the country; through the ebb and flow of history, Egypt, beneath the apparent idolatry of her exterior polytheism, ever retained the old foundation of her occult theogony and sacerdotal organisation. She resisted the flight of time as does the pyramid of Gizeh, whole and intact, though half buried beneath the sand. Thanks to that secret sphinx-like immobility, that granite resistance, Egypt became the axis round which rolled the religious thought of humanity as it passed from Asia into Europe. Judæa, Greece, Etruria were so many living souls which formed different civilisations. But from what source did they draw their root-ideas if not from the organic reserve of ancient Egypt? Moses and Orpheus founded two distinct and wonderful religions, the one distinguished by its fierce monotheism, the other by a dazzling polytheism. Where did the

one find the strength, the energy, and the boldness necessary to recast, like brass in a furnace, a half-savage nation, and where did the other acquire the magical power of making the gods speak, like a well-tuned lyre, to the soul of its charmed barbarian races? In the temples of Osiris, in ancient Thebes, which the initiates called the city of the sun or the solar Ark—because it contained the synthesis of divine science and all the secrets of initiation.

Every year, at the summer solstice, when a deluge of rain pours down in Abyssinia, the Nile changes colour, assuming the blood-red tint of which the Bible speaks. The river remains swollen until the autumn equinox, burying beneath its waves the horizon of its banks. Standing on their granite table-lands, beneath the blinding sun, the temples cut out of the solid rock, the necropoles and the pyramids reflect their majestic ruins in the Nile, now changed into a sea. The Egyptian priesthood has gone through the ages, taking with it its organisation and its symbols, the secrets—so long impenetrable—of its science. Within these temples, crypts, and pyramids was developed the famous doctrine of the Logos-Light, the universal Word which Moses was to enclose within his golden ark, and of which Christ was to be the living torch.

Truth is immutable in itself; it alone survives everything though it changes abode as well as form and its revelations are intermittent. "The light of Osiris" which formerly threw light for the initiates over the depths of nature and the vaults of heaven, is extinguished for ever in the abandoned crypts. The saying of Hermes to Asclepius has been realised: "O Egypt! Egypt! There shall remain for thee for future generations only fables that no one will believe, nothing of thee shall endure except words cut out in stone."

All the same, we shall try to bring back to life one ray of this mysterious sun of the sanctuaries by pursuing the secret path of the Egyptian initiation of former times so far as esoteric intuition will allow.

Before entering the temple, however, let us cast a glance over the mighty phases Egypt passed through before the times of the Hyksos, or Shepherd dynasty.

The first Egyptian civilisation, almost as old as the very carcase of our continents, dates back to the ancient red race.[1] The colossal sphinx of

[1] In an inscription of the fourth dynasty, mention is made of the sphinx as being a monument whose origin was lost in the night of time, and that it had been found by chance in this reign, buried by the desert sand beneath which it had been forgotten for long generations, Fr. Lenormant, *Hist. d'Orient.* The

Gizeh, near the large pyramid, is its work. At the time when the Delta (formed at a later period by the alluvial deposits of the Nile) had not yet come into existence, this monstrous, symbolical animal was lying there on its granite hill, in front of the chain of the Lybian mountains, watching the sea dash at its feet on the very spot where now stretches a waste of desert sand. The sphinx, that first creation of Egypt, has become its principal symbol, its distinctive mark. The most ancient of all human priesthoods engraved it, an image of nature, calm and redoubtable in its mystery. The head of a man issues from the body of a bull with the claws of a lion, and presses its eagle's wings to its sides. This is terrestrial Isis, nature in the living unity of its reign. For these immemorial priesthoods even then knew and taught that, in the mighty scheme of evolution, the human emerges from the animal nature. In this compound of the bull, the lion, the eagle, and the man the four animals of the vision of Ezekiel are also contained, representing four elements that constitute the microcosm and the macrocosm, water, earth, air, and fire, the basis of occult science. This is why, in succeeding centuries, when initiates saw the

fourth dynasty carries us back to 4000 years before Christ. Judge, then, of the antiquity of the sphinx !

sacred animal, lying on the threshold of the temples or in the depths of the crypts, they could feel this mystery living within themselves and silently fold back the wings of their spirit over the inner truth. For long before Œdipus, they were to know that the key to the enigma of the sphinx was man, the microcosm, the divine agent, who sums up in himself all the elements and powers of nature.

The red race has left of itself no other witness than the sphinx of Gizeh, but this alone is an irrefutable proof that it had set itself and solved, in its own way, the mighty problem.

CHAPTER II

HERMES

The black race which succeeded the southern red race in the rule of the world made its principal sanctuary in Upper Egypt. The name of Hermes-Thoth, that mysterious, first initiator of Egypt into the secret doctrines, doubtless refers to a first and a pacific mingling of the white and the black races in the regions of Ethiopia and Upper Egypt, long before Aryan times. Hermes is a generic name, like Manou and Buddha. It means, at the same time, a man, a caste, and a god. As man, Hermes is the first, the mighty initiator of Egypt; as caste, it is the priesthood, guardian of occult traditions, whilst as god, it is the planet Mercury, assimilated to a whole category of spirits, divine initiators; in a word, Hermes presides over the supraterrestrial region of the celestial initiation. In the spiritual economy of the world, all these things are bound together by secret affinities as by an invisible thread. The name of Hermes is a talisman which sums them all up, a magic sound

evoking them into existence. Hence the prestige it possessed. The Greeks, disciples of the Egyptians, called him Hermes Trismegistus, or Thrice-Greatest Hermes, because he was looked upon as king, law-giver, and priest. He typifies a period in which the priesthood, the magistracy, and the kingship were united in a single governing body. The Egyptian chronology of Manetho calls this period the reign of the gods. There was then neither papyrus nor phonetic writing, but the sacred ideography was already in existence; the science of the priesthood was inscribed in hieroglyphs on the columns and walls of the crypts. It passed later on into the libraries of the temples, considerably strengthened, and the Egyptians attributed to Hermes forty-two books dealing with occult science. The Greek book known as *Hermes Trismegistus* certainly contains relics, impaired, it is true, though infinitely precious, of ancient theogony, which is like the *fiat lux*, whence Moses and Orpheus received their first beams of light. The doctrine of the Fire-Principle and of the Word-Light, contained in the *Vision of Hermes*, will remain the summit and centre of Egyptian initiation.

We shall shortly endeavour to regain this vision of the masters, this mystic rose which blooms only

in the night of the sanctuary, and in the secret of the great religions. Certain sayings of Hermes, taken from the ancient wisdom, are well calculated to prepare us for this. "None of our thoughts," he said to his disciple Asclepius, "is capable of conceiving God, nor any language of defining Him. That which is incorporeal, formless, invisible, cannot be grasped by our senses; that which is eternal cannot be measured by the short rules of time. God is accordingly ineffable. True, He can communicate to certain elect the power to rise above material concerns, to perceive some radiance of His supreme perfection; but these elect can find no words to interpret into ordinary language the immaterial vision which has thrilled their inmost souls. They may explain to humanity the secondary causes of the creations which pass beneath their eyes as being images of universal life, but the first cause remains veiled and we shall succeed in understanding it only when we have passed through the portals of death." In such terms Hermes spoke of the unknown God at the entrance to the crypts. The disciples who penetrated with him into their depths, learnt to know him as a living being.[1]

[1] Learned and esoteric theology, says M. Maspéro, has been monotheistic ever since the times of the Ancient Empire. The

The book speaks of his death as of the departure of a god. "Hermes saw the totality of things, and having seen, understood, and having understood, had the power to manifest and reveal. What he thought, he wrote, what he wrote he most concealed, both wisely keeping silent and speaking, so that the whole duration of the world to come should seek these things. Thus, having commanded the gods, his brothers, to follow in his procession, he mounted to the stars." If need be, it is possible to isolate the political history of peoples, but not their religious history. The religions of Assyria, Egypt, Judæa, and Greece can only be understood when their union with the ancient Indo-Aryan religion is seen. Taken separately, they are so many puzzles and enigmas; seen together and from above, they form a glorious

affirmation of the fundamental unity of the Divine Being may be read in formal and energetic terms, in texts dating from this period. God is the only One, He who exists in essence, the only one living in substance, the sole generator in heaven and on earth who is not Himself engendered. At once Father, Mother, and Son, He engenders, brings to birth and is perpetually, and these three persons, far from dividing divine nature, work together to His infinite perfection. His attributes are immensity, eternity, independence, almighty will, boundless goodness. "He creates His own members which are the Gods" the old texts say. Each of these secondary gods, considered as identical with the one God, may form a new type, from which other inferior types emanate in turn and by the same process.—*Histoire ancienne des peuples de l'Orient.*

evolution in which everything is mutually controlled and explained. In a word, the history of a religion will always be narrow, superstitious, and false, truth is to be found only in the religious history of mankind. From these heights, only those currents which make the round of the globe can be felt. The Egyptian people, the most independent and exclusive of all to outside influences, could not escape this universal law. Five thousand years before our era, the light of Rama shed its rays over Egypt and became the law of Ammon-Rā, the solar god of Thebes. It was such a constitution that enabled it to brave so many revolutions. Menes was the first king of justice, the first Pharaoh to carry out this law. He took care not to remove from Egypt its former theology which was also his own. All he did was to confirm and expand it, adding to it a new social organisation. The priesthood, that is, the educational part of it, was assigned to a first chamber ; the administration of justice to another ; of government to the two ; royalty was conceived of as their delegation and under their control ; the relative independence of laws or townships was placed as the corner-stone of the society. This we may call the government of the initiates. It had as key-stone a synthesis of the sciences, known under the name of Osiris (O-Sir-Is),

the intellectual lord. The great pyramid is its symbol as is also the mathematical gnomon. The Pharaoh who received his initiation name from the temple, who exercised the sacerdotal and royal art on the throne, was quite a different personage from the Assyrian despot whose arbitrary power was based on crime and blood. The Pharaoh was the crowned initiate, or at any rate the pupil and instrument of the initiates. For centuries the Pharaohs are to defend against despotic Asia and anarchist Europe the law of the Ram which then represented the rights of justice and international arbitration.

About the year 2200 B.C. Egypt underwent the most redoubtable crisis any people can pass through : that of foreign invasion and semi-conquest. The Phœnician invasion itself was the consequence of the great religious schism in Asia which had stirred up the masses by sowing dissension in the temples. Led by the king-shepherds called Hyksos, the deluge of this invasion rolled over the Delta and Central Egypt. The schismatic kings brought with them a corrupted civilisation, Ionic effeminacy, and Asiatic luxury, the institution of the harem and gross idolatry. The very existence of Egypt was compromised, its intellectuality endangered and its world-wide mission threatened. Still it had a living

soul, that is to say, an organised body of initiates, guardians of the ancient science of Hermes and of Ammon-Rā. What became of this soul? It withdrew into the depths of its sanctuaries, concentrating its strength the better to resist the enemy. To outward appearance, the priesthood bowed before the invasion and openly recognised the usurpers who introduced the law of the Bull and the worship of Apis. And yet, concealed within their temples, the two councils guarded as a sacred charge their science and traditions, the ancient and undefiled religion, and along with it the hope of the restoration of the national dynasty. It was at this period that the priests spread among the people the legend of Isis and Osiris, the dismemberment of the latter and his coming resurrection by his son Horus, who found his scattered limbs which had been carried off by the Nile. The imagination of the people was stirred up by the pomp of public ceremonies. Their love for the old religion was kept alive by representing to them the misfortunes of the goddess, her lamentations at the loss of her celestial spouse, and the hope she placed in her son Horus, the divine mediator. At the same time, however, the initiates considered it necessary to make esoteric truth impossible to attack, by covering it over with a triple veil. The inner,

learned organisation of the lesser and the greater Mysteries corresponds with the diffusion of the popular worship of Isis and Osiris. They were girt around with terrible dangers and almost insuperable barriers. Moral tests were invented, the oath of silence exacted, and the penalty of death rigorously enforced against any initiates who divulged the slightest details of the Mysteries. Owing to this strict organisation, the Egyptian initiation became not merely the refuge of esoteric doctrine but also the crucible, the test of a national resurrection and the school of future religions. Whilst crowned usurpers were reigning at Memphis, Thebes was slowly preparing the regeneration of the country. From its temple and solar ark sprang the saviour of Egypt, Amos, who expelled the Hyksos, and restored to their rights Egyptian science and the male religion of Osiris.

In this way the Mysteries saved the soul of Egypt, beneath a foreign tyranny, and that for the good of humanity. Such at that time was the might of their discipline and the power of their initiation, that they consisted of the loftiest moral and intellectual forces in the land.

Ancient initiation rested on a conception of man at once grander and healthier than ours. We have separated the education of the body from that of

the mind and of the spirit. Our physical and natural sciences, though advanced in themselves, do not deal with the principle of the soul and its diffusion throughout the universe; our religion does not satisfy the needs of the intelligence; our medicine will know absolutely nothing of either soul or spirit. The men of the present day look for pleasure without happiness, happiness without science, and science without wisdom. The ancients would not allow the possibility of separating such things, in every domain of life they took into account the triple nature of man. Initiation was a gradual training of the whole human being to the lofty heights of the spirit whence the life could be dominated. "To attain to mastery," said the sages of the past, "man needs a total remodelling of his physical, moral, and intellectual nature. Now, this remodelling is possible only by the simultaneous exercise of will, intuition, and reasoning. By the complete agreement of these three, man can develop his faculties to incalculable limits. The soul possesses buried senses which initiation rouses to life. By profound study and constant application, man can place himself in conscious relation with the hidden forces of the universe. By a prodigious effort, he can attain to direct spiritual perception, open out for himself the paths of the

life beyond the grave, and render himself capable of travelling along these paths. Then only can he say that he has conquered destiny and acquired his divine liberty even here below. Then only can the initiate become an initiator, prophet, and theurgist, *i.e.* a seer and creator of souls. For only he who rules himself can rule others, only he who is free can set others free."

Such were the thoughts of the initiates of old, and the greatest among them lived and acted accordingly. Real initiation accordingly was anything but an empty dream or simple scientific teaching; it was the creation of a soul by itself, its birth on a higher plane, its blossoming in the divine world.

We will now imagine ourselves in the times of the Rameses, about the time when Moses and Orpheus were living, the year 1300 B.C., and endeavour to penetrate into the heart of Egyptian initiation. Figured monuments, the books of Hermes, and the Jewish and Greek traditions,[1] enable us to revive its main points and form some idea of its loftiest revelations.

[1] ΙΑΜΒΛΙΧΟΥ, *περὶ Μυστηρίων λόγος.*

CHAPTER III

ISIS—THE INITIATION—THE TESTS

In the time of the Rameses, Egyptian civilisation had reached the acme of its glory. The Pharaohs of the twentieth dynasty, pupils and sword-bearers of the sanctuaries, continued, like true heroes, the struggle against Babylon. Egyptian archers harassed the Lybians and Numidians, right to the very centre of Africa. A fleet of four hundred sails pursued the league of the schismatics to the mouth of the Indus. The better to oppose Assyria and her allies, the Rameses had marked out strategic roads up to Lebanon and built a chain of forts between Mageddo and Karkemish. Architectural work continued without pause, keeping the workmen of three continents in constant employment. The hypostyle hall of Karnak, each pillar of which reaches the height of the Vendôme column, was repaired; the temple of Abydos was enriched with wonders in sculpture, and the valley of the kings with magnificent monuments. At Memphis

rose the Ramesseum, surrounded with a forest of obelisks, statues, and monoliths of enormous size.

In the midst of this feverish activity many a stranger from the distant shores of Asia Minor or the mountains of Thrace had come to Egypt to be initiated into her Mysteries, attracted by the reputation of her temples. On reaching Memphis, he stood still with wonderment and awe. Monuments and public fêtes, everything gave him an impression of opulence and grandeur. After the ceremony of the royal consecration, which took place in the secret places of the sanctuary, he saw the Pharaoh leave the temple in the presence of the crowd, and carried off by a dozen fan-bearers, officers of his staff. In front of him, twelve young Levites held the royal insignia on gold-embroidered cushions: the ram-headed sceptre of the arbiters, the sword, the ark, and the mace. Behind him came the king's household and the sacerdotal colleges, followed by initiates in the greater and lesser mysteries. The pontiffs wore white tiaras and their breasts flashed with the fire of symbolical stones. The dignitaries of the crown wore decorations of the Lamb, the Ram, the Lion, the Lily, and the Bee, hanging down from massive chains of admirable workmanship. City corporations closed the march,

with emblems and banners unfolded.[1] At night, boats gaily decked with flags, carried, on artificial lakes, the royal orchestras in whose midst could be seen female dancers, standing out in hieratic postures.

This crush and pomp, however, was not what he sought; it was the desire to penetrate the secret of things, the thirst of knowledge that had brought him from such a distance. He had been told that magi and hierophants, possessed of divine wisdom, lived in the sanctuaries of Egypt, and he too wished to enter into the secret of the gods. A priest of his country had spoken to him of the *Book of the Dead*, of the mysterious roll, placed beneath the heads of mummies, to serve as a viaticum, and relating in symbolic form the after-death journey of the soul, according to the priests of Ammon-Rā. With eager curiosity and a certain inner trembling, mingled with doubt, he had followed this long journey of the soul beyond the grave; its expiation in a burning region; the purification of its sidereal envelope, its meeting of the evil pilot, with face averted, seated in a barque, and of the good pilot, who looks one in the face; his appearance before the forty-two earthly judges; his justification by

[1] See the mural paintings in the temples of Thebes, reproduced in the book of François Lenormant, and the chapter on Egypt in *La Mission des Juifs* by M. Saint-Yves d'Alveydre.

Thoth, and finally his entry and transfiguration into the light of Osiris. We can judge of the power of this book and the total revolution which Egyptian initiation sometimes operated in the minds of men, by the following passage from the *Book of the Dead*: "This chapter was found at Hermopolis, in blue writing on an alabaster slab, at the feet of the god Thoth (Hermes) in the time of king Menkara, by Prince Hastetef, when travelling on an inspection of the temples. He carried the stone into the royal temple. Oh! mighty secret! He neither saw nor heard more, on reading this pure and holy chapter, no longer did he approach any woman, neither did he eat flesh or fish."[1] What truth was there in these disturbing accounts, in these hieratic images behind which sparkled the terrible mystery beyond the grave? Isis and Osiris know! they told him. But what were these gods who were only spoken of in mysterious whispers? It was to know this that the stranger knocked at the door of the mighty temple of Thebes or of Memphis.

Servants conducted him beneath the portico of an inner court, whose enormous pillars resembled gigantic lotus blooms as they upheld by their strength and purity the Solar Ark, the temple of Osiris. The hierophant drew near the new-comer.

[1] *Book of the Dead*, chap. lxiv.

His majestic features and tranquil countenance, the mystery of his dark, impenetrable eyes, glowing with an inner light, at once filled the candidate with awe. That look pierced like a needle, and the stranger felt himself in the presence of a man from whom it would be impossible to conceal anything. The priest of Osiris questioned the newcomer regarding his native town, his family, and the temple in which he had received his instruction. If, in the course of this brief but searching examination, he was judged to be unworthy of the Mysteries, he was shown to the door with a silent but irrevocable gesture. On the other hand, if the hierophant found in the aspirant a sincere yearning after truth, he requested him to follow. They crossed porticoes and inner courts, then they proceeded along a rock-hewn avenue opened to the sky and lined with many a stela and sphinx, until they reached a small temple leading to the subterranean crypts. Over the door was a life-size statue of Isis. The goddess was seated in an attitude of peace and meditation, and with a closed book on her knee. Her face was veiled, and at the foot of the statue could be read the words :

"My veil no mortal hand hath raised."

"This is the door of the occult sanctuary," said the hierophant. "Look at these two columns,

The red represents the spirit ascending towards the light of Osiris, the black signifies its captivity in matter, and the fall may go as far as utter annihilation. Whosoever enters upon our science and doctrine risks his life. The weak or the evil-doer find therein madness or death; the strong and pure alone find life and immortality. Many have foolishly entered by this door and have never come out alive, for it is an abyss from whose depths only the bold and fearless come back to the light. Reflect seriously on what you are going to do, on the dangers you are to run, and if your courage is not invincible, give up the enterprise, for once this door closes on you, it will be too late to draw back."

If the stranger persisted in his determination, the hierophant took him into the outer court and gave him up to the servants of the temple, with whom he was to spend a week, engaged in the humblest of tasks, listening to hymns, and performing ablutions. The most rigorous silence was imposed on him.

When the trial evening had come, two attendants conducted the aspirant after the mysteries to the door of the occult sanctuary. They entered a dark vestibule, without any apparent exit. On either side of this gloomy-looking hall, the light of torches

enabled the stranger to see a row of statues with human bodies and heads of animals, lions, bulls, birds of prey, and serpents which seemed to mock at him as he passed. At the end of this sinister avenue which was crossed without a word being uttered, stood a mummy and a human skeleton, face to face. The two attendants pointed in silence to a hole in the wall in front of the novice. This led to a passage so low that it could only be entered on all fours.

"You are still permitted to retrace your steps," said one of the attendants. "The door of the sanctuary is not yet closed. If you do not wish this, you must proceed along this path, and there will be no return for you."

"I will go forward," said the novice, screwing up all his courage.

A small lighted lamp was given to him, and the attendants returned, noisily closing the sanctuary door. There could be no more hesitation; he had to enter the passage. Scarcely had he crawled forward a few feet than he heard a voice coming from the depths of the subterranean cavern, and saying: "Here perish all who foolishly covet knowledge and power." Owing to the wonderful acoustics of the spot, these words were repeated seven times by distanced echoes. He had to go

forward, for all that; the passage widened out, but the descent became ever more steep. Finally the bold traveller found himself in front of a shaft, terminating in a hole through which passed an iron ladder. This the novice descended. On reaching the last rung, his terrified glance plunged into a hideous-looking well. The poor naphtha lamp, which he convulsively clutched in his trembling hand, threw a vacillating light over the impenetrable darkness. What was he to do? Above him, return was impossible; below, a fall into the frightful blackness of night. In his distress, he perceived a small crevice on his left. Hanging on to the ladder with one hand, and extending his lamp with the other, he saw steps and a staircase. Safety at last! He was now free from the abyss, for he mounted the winding staircase which pierced the rock like an enormous gimlet. At last the candidate found himself in front of some bronze rails opening into an extensive gallery supported by immense caryatids. At intervals along the walls could be seen two rows of symbolical frescoes. There were eleven of these on each side, dimly lit by crystal lamps which the lovely caryatids held aloft in their hands.

The gate was opened to the novice by a magian, called a *pastophor* (shrine or casket bearer) who

kept guard over the sacred symbols. This latter welcomed him with a benevolent smile, congratulating him on having come successfully through the first test. Then he conducted him through the gallery, explaining the meanings of the sacred pictures, each of which was marked with a letter and a number. The twenty-two symbols represented the first twenty-two arcana and constituted the alphabet of occult science, *i.e.* the absolute principles and universal keys which, when applied by the will, become the source and origin of all wisdom and power. These principles were fixed in the memory by their correspondence with the letters of the sacred tongue and with the numbers attached to these letters. In this tongue each letter and number expresses a ternary law, having its repercussion in the *divine world*, the *intellectual world*, and the *physical world*. Just as a finger, when it touches the chord of a lyre makes one note of the scale resound and all its harmonics vibrate, in the same way the spirit, which contemplates all the virtualities of a number, the voice which utters a letter with the full consciousness of its meaning, summon forth a power which finds its repercussion in the three worlds.

Thus the letter A, which corresponds to the number 1, expresses *in the divine world*, the absolute

Being whence emanate all beings; *in the intellectual world*, unity, the source and synthesis of numbers; and *in the physical world*, man, the summit of relative beings, who, by the expansion of his faculties, raises himself into the concentric spheres of the infinite. The Egyptians represented the arcanum I by a white-robed Magian, with sceptre in hand and a golden crown on his head. The white robe signified purity; the sceptre, command; and the golden crown, universal light.

The novice was far from understanding all the strange and novel things he heard; unknown perspectives, however, opened out before him, at the words of the pastophor, in the presence of those fine paintings which looked down on him with the impassive gravity of the gods. Behind each of them, as in a flash, he caught glimpses of whole strings of thoughts and images suddenly evoked. For the first time, he suspected *the within* of the world, through the mysterious chain of causes. Thus, from letter to letter, and from number to number, the master explained to the pupil the meaning of the arcana and led him by *Isis Urania* to the *chariot of Osiris*, by the *thunder-struck tower* to the *flaming star*, and finally to *the crown of the Magi*. "Learn what this crown means," said the pastophor, "Every will which unites itself to God

to work justice and show forth truth, enters, this very life, into participation of the divine power over beings and things, the eternal recompense of freed spirits." The neophyte listened to the master speaking with mingled feelings of fear, surprise, and delight. These were the first lights of the sanctuary and this faint glimpse of truth seemed to him the dawn of a divine remembrance.

The tests, however, were not at an end. When he had finished speaking, the pastophor opened a door leading to another long and narrow vault, at the end of which he heard the crackling of a fiery furnace. "This is death!" exclaimed the novice, looking at his guide with a shudder of fright. "My son," replied the pastophor, "Death affrights none but abortive natures. Long ago, I crossed that flame as though it were a field of roses." As he spoke, the gate closed behind the candidate, who, on drawing near to the line of fire, saw that the furnace melted away into an optical illusion formed by twigs of resinous wood, interlaced and arranged in quincunx order. A footpath, traced through the midst of it, enabled him to pass rapidly to the far side. The *trial by fire* was followed by the *trial by water*. The candidate was forced to cross a lake of stagnant black water, by the light of burning naphtha behind him in the

chamber of fire. After this, two attendants conducted him, still trembling with dread, to an obscure grotto, where nothing could be seen beyond a soft couch, over which a bronze lamp, hanging from the vault, cast a mysterious, subdued light. Then they dried him and anointed his body with exquisite perfumes, after which he was clothed in fine linen and left alone, with the words: "Rest and await the hierophant."

The novice stretched out his tired limbs on the sumptuous covering of his bed. After all these varied emotions, a moment's calm seemed sweet to him. The sacred paintings he had seen, all these strange figures, sphinxes, and caryatids, came back to him in imagination. But why was one of these paintings like a haunting hallucination? He could not dispel the vision of the arcanum X, represented by a wheel suspended on its axle between two columns. On the one side rises Hermanubis, the genius of Good, beautiful as a youth on the threshold of manhood; on the other Typhon, the genius of Evil, plunges head foremost into the abyss. Between the two was seated a sphinx, on the summit of the wheel, holding a sword in her claw.

A vague murmur of lascivious music which seemed to issue from the depths of the grotto,

dispelled this image. These were light, indefinable sounds, sorrowful, languishing strains. His ear was caught by a metallic tinkle, mingled with the thrilling harmonies of a harp, the strains of a flute, and panting sighs like a burning breath. Wrapped in a dream of fire, the stranger closed his eyes. On opening them, he perceived close to his couch, an intoxicating vision of life and infernal seductiveness. A Nubian woman, clad in gauze of transparent purple, wearing a necklace of amulets and charms after the fashion of the priestesses of the mysteries of Mylitta, stood there gazing at him, holding in her left hand, a goblet crowned with roses. She was of that Nubian type whose intense and intoxicating sensuality concentrates all the powers of the feminine animal: projecting cheek-bones, dilated nostrils, and thick lips resembling luscious, red fruit. Her dark eyes flashed brightly through the dim light. The novice had leapt to his feet; in his surprise he instinctively crossed his hands over his breast, not knowing whether to tremble or rejoice. The slave, however, slowly drew near, and with downcast eyes murmured in low accents: "Art thou afraid of me, handsome stranger? I bring thee the victor's reward, oblivion of pain and sorrow, the goblet of happiness." . . . The novice hesitated; then the Nubian, apparently

overcome with fatigue, sank down on to the couch and wrapped the stranger in a beseeching, captivating glance, as with a long, moist flame. Woe be to him if he dares to accept the offer and brave her, bending over that mouth and drinking in the intoxication of the heavy perfumes which rise from those bronzed shoulders. Once he touches that hand, and sips from that goblet, he is lost . . . rolling over the couch, entwined in that burning embrace. Then, when his savage desire has been appeased, the liquid he has drunk plunges him into profound sleep. On awaking, he finds himself alone, tortured with anguish. The lamp casts a funereal light over his disordered couch. In front of him stands a man, the hierophant, who says to him :

" Thou hast shown thyself victor in the first tests. Thou hast triumphed over death, fire, and water, but thou hast not been able to conquer thyself. Thou, who aspirest after the lofty heights of knowledge and of the spirit, hast succumbed to the first temptation of the senses, thou hast fallen into the abyss of matter. The man who is enslaved to the senses, lives in darkness. Thou hast preferred darkness to light, remain therefore in darkness. I had warned thee of the dangers to which thou wert exposing thyself. Now thou hast saved

thy life, but lost thy liberty. Under penalty of death, thou shalt remain a slave of the temple."

If, on the other hand, the candidate had dashed the goblet to the ground and thrust aside the temptress, twelve attendants, armed with torches, surrounded him and led him away in triumph into the sanctuary of Isis, where a full assembly of magi, arranged in a semicircle, awaited him. At the other end of the temple, which was splendidly illuminated, he perceived the colossal statue of Isis in molten metal, a golden rose on her breast and crowned with a diadem of seven rays. In her arms she held her son Horus. There before the goddess, the hierophant, clad in purple, received the new-comer, who, under the most terrible of penalties, swore the oath of silence and submission. Thereupon, he greeted him, in the name of the whole assembly, as a brother and a future initiate. Before the august, calm-visaged masters, the disciple of Isis believed himself to be in the presence of the gods. Nobler and greater than ever before, he entered for the first time into the sphere of truth.

CHAPTER IV

OSIRIS. DEATH AND RESURRECTION

And yet he had reached only the threshold of truth, for now long years of study and apprenticeship were to begin. Before rising to the celestial Isis he must know the terrestrial Isis and become learned in physical and androgonic science. His time was spent in meditation within his cell, the study of hieroglyphs in the halls and courts of the immense temple, and the lessons of the masters. He learned the science of minerals and plants, the history of mankind and of nations, medicine, architecture, and sacred music. This long apprenticeship was to end not only *in knowing*, but *in becoming*. He was to gain strength by renunciation. The sages of the past believed that man came into possession of truth only on condition that it became a part of his inmost being, a spontaneous act of the soul. In this profound task of assimilation, however, the pupil was left to himself. His masters gave him no help; often did he wonder at their coldness and indifference. Attentive supervision

was kept over him, he was bound down to observe inflexible rules, absolute obedience was exacted of him, but no revelation was made to him beyond certain limits. The only reply he received to his uneasy questionings was: "Wait and work." Then followed sudden feelings of revolt and bitter regret, and frightful suspicions came to him. Had he become the slave of audacious impostors or of black magicians who, for some infamous purpose or other, were dominating his will? Truth had taken to flight and the very gods were forsaking him; he was alone, a prisoner in the temple. Truth had appeared to him in the form of a sphinx, which now said to him: "I am Doubt!" And the winged beast, with its impassive woman's head and lion's claws, carried him off to the burning sand of the desert, there to tear and rend him.

These nightmares were followed by hours of divine calm and foresight, during which he understood the symbolical meaning of the tests he had gone through on entering the temple. For, alas! the gloomy well into which he had almost fallen was not so black as the abyss of unfathomable truth; the fire he had passed through was less dreadful than the passions which still consumed his flesh; and the murky, ice-cold water into which

he had had to plunge was less cold than the doubt into which, in its evil hours, his spirit sank and was swamped.

In one of the halls of the temple, he saw arranged in two rows the sacred paintings which had been explained to him as representing the twenty-two arcana, on the night of the tests. These arcana, of which he was permitted to obtain a glimpse on the very threshold of occult science, were the columns of theology; though to understand them, he must pass through the whole initiation. None of the masters had since mentioned them again to him; he was permitted only to walk down the hall and meditate on these signs. Here he spent many a long, solitary hour. By means of these figures, chaste as light and grave as eternity, the truth that can neither be seen nor felt slowly filtered into the heart of the neophyte. In the mute company of these silent and nameless divinities, each one of whom seemed to preside over some sphere of life, he began to experience something new: at first, a descent to the very depths of his being, then a kind of detachment from the world which caused him to soar above terrestrial objects. At times he would ask one of the magi: "Shall I some day be permitted to scent the rose of Isis and see the light of Osiris?" The reply was: "That does

not depend on us. Truth is not given ; it is found in oneself or not found at all. We cannot make an adept of thee, thou must become one thyself. Long does the lotus press upwards beneath the surface of the stream, before spreading out its petals to the light. Hasten not the unfolding of the divine flower. If it is to come, it will come in its due season. Work and pray."

With feelings of mingled sadness and joy, the disciple returned to his studies and meditations. He experienced the austere though tender charm of that solitude through which passes, as it were, a breath of the being of beings. Thus months and years passed by. He felt a slow transformation, a complete metamorphosis taking place in himself. The passions which had beset his youth vanished like shadows, and the thoughts which now surrounded him smiled on him like immortal friends. What he felt from time to time was the engulfing of his terrestrial ego and the birth of a purer and more ethereal one. With such feelings he would fling himself down before the steps of the closed sanctuary. Then all desire and revolt, and even regret left him, and there was only an absolute yielding of his soul to the gods, a complete surrender to truth. "Oh, Isis!" he said in his prayer, "since my soul is nothing else than a tear of thine

eyes, grant that it may fall like dew on other souls, and that, when I die, I may feel their perfume ascending to thee. I am now ready for the sacrifice."

After one of these silent prayers, the disciple, in a state of semi-ecstasy, saw the hierophant, enveloped in the warm light of the setting sun, standing by his side, like a vision that had issued from the ground. The master seemed to read every single thought of the disciple, to penetrate the entire drama of his inner life.

"My son," he said, "the hour draws nigh when truth shall be revealed to thee. Already hast thou divined it by descending into the depths of thy own nature, and finding divine life therein. Thou art about to enter into the mighty, ineffable communion of the initiates, for thou art worthy by thy purity of heart, thy love of truth and power of abnegation. No one, however, crosses the threshold of Osiris, without passing through death and resurrection. We will accompany thee into the crypt. Fear not, for thou art already one of our brethren."

At the twilight hour, the priests of Osiris, with torches in their hands, accompanied the new adept into a low crypt supported by four pillars which themselves rested on statues of

the sphinx. In one corner was an open marble sarcophagus.[1]

"No man," said the hierophant, "escapes death; every living soul is destined to resurrection. The adept passes living through the tomb, and enters in this life into the light of Osiris. Do thou therefore lie in this coffin and await the light. This night thou shalt cross the portals of Dread and attain to the threshold of Mastership."

The adept placed himself in the open sarcophagus, the hierophant stretched out his hand to bless him, and the procession of the initiates silently quitted the vault. A small lamp, placed on the ground, still casts a flickering light over the four statues of the sphinx which support the stout columns of the crypt. A low, muffled chorus of deep voices is now heard. Whence comes it? It is the funeral

[1] Archæologists have, long ago, seen in the sarcophagus of the Great Pyramid of Gizeh, the tomb of King Sesostris, if we may believe Herodotus, who was not an initiate, and to whom the Egyptian priests scarcely entrusted anything else than amusing popular tales. The kings of Egypt, however, had their tombs elsewhere. The strange inner structure of the pyramid proves that it must have been used in the initiation ceremonies and secret practices of the priests of Osiris. In it are found *the Well of Truth* we have described, the ascending staircase, the hall of the arcana. . . . The so-called *Chamber of the King*, which contains the sarcophagus, was the one into which the adept was led on the eve of his great initiation. The same arrangements were reproduced in the large temples of Central and Upper Egypt.

chant! . . . Now it dies away, the lamp flickers for the last time and dies out completely. The adept is alone in the darkness; the cold of the sepulchre, falling on him, casts a chill through every limb. He passes gradually through all the painful sensations of death, and falls into a lethargic condition. His life passes before him in successive scenes, like something unreal, and his earthly consciousness becomes ever more vague and diffuse. But in proportion as he feels his body melting away, the etheric, fluid part of his being is released and he enters into a state of ecstasy. . . .

What is that shining spot in the distance, scarcely perceptible through the black darkness? As he draws near, it increases in size and becomes a star, whose five rays have all the colours of the rainbow as it sends out into the blackness discharges of electric or magnetic light. Now it is a sun which attracts him by the whiteness of its incandescent centre. Is it the magic of the masters which has produced this vision; the invisible which now becomes visible? Or is it the portent of celestial truth, the blazing star of hope and immortality? It disappears; and in its place a bud opens its petals in the night, a flower that is not of matter, though sensitive and endowed with a soul. For it opens before him like a white rose; it spreads out

its petals and he sees a quiver come over its living leaves, and its blazing calyx grow redder than ever. Is it the flower of Isis, the mystic Rose of Wisdom which confines Love in its heart? Now it fades away like a cloud of perfumes. Then the ecstatic being feels a warm, caressing breath flow over it. After assuming strange forms, the cloud condenses and becomes a human figure, the form of a woman, the Isis of the occult sanctuary, though younger, smiling and luminous. A transparent veil twists in spirals around her and her body shines through it. In her hand she holds a papyrus scroll. Softly she draws near, leans over the initiate lying in his tomb and says to him: "I am thy invisible sister, thy divine soul, and this is the book of thy life. Some of the pages are filled with records of thy past existences, the blank pages are for thy future lives. Some day, I will unroll them all before thee. Thou knowest me now, call me and I will come!" While she speaks, a ray of tender love darts forth from her eyes. . . . Oh! Thou presence of my spiritual self, ineffable promise of the divine, marvellous blending into the impalpable beyond! . . .

And now everything breaks up, the vision is effaced. A frightful rending takes place, and the adept feels himself precipitated into his body as

into a corpse. He returns to the state of conscious lethargy; iron bands seem to hold down his limbs; a terrible weight crushes into his brain; he awakes . . . and finds standing before him the hierophant, accompanied by the magi. They surround him, give him a cordial to drink, and he rises to his feet.

"Thou hast now returned to life," said the prophet. "Come and celebrate with us the love-feast of the initiates and tell us of thy voyage into the light of Osiris. For henceforth, thou art one of us."

Let us now transport ourselves along with the hierophant and the newly-appointed initiate on to the observatory of the temple, in the warm splendour of an Egyptian night. It was there that the chief of the temple gave the new adept the mighty revelation, relating to him *the vision of Hermes*. This vision was written on no papyrus, but marked in symbolical signs on the stelas of the secret crypt, known to the prophet alone. Its meaning was transmitted orally from pontiff to pontiff.

"Listen," said the hierophant, "this vision contains the eternal history of the world and the circle of things."

CHAPTER V

THE VISION OF HERMES[1]

ONE day, Hermes, after reflecting on the origin of things, fell asleep. A dull torpor took possession of his body; but in proportion as the latter grew benumbed, his spirit ascended into space. Then an immense being, of indeterminate form, seemed to call him by name.

"Who art thou?" said the terrified Hermes.

"I am Osiris, the sovereign Intelligence who is able to unveil all things. What desirest thou?"

"To behold the source of beings, O divine Osiris, and to know God."

"Thou shalt be satisfied."

Immediately Hermes felt himself plunged in a delicious light. In its pellucid billows passed the ravishing forms of all beings. Suddenly, a terrifying

[1] *The Vision of Hermes* is found at the beginning of the books of *Hermes Trismegistus*, under the name of *Poimandres*. The ancient Egyptian tradition has come down to us only in a slightly changed Alexandrian form. I have attempted to reconstitute this important fragment of Hermetic doctrine in the sense of the lofty initiation and esoteric synthesis it represents.

encircling darkness descended upon him. Hermes was in a humid chaos, filled with smoke and with a heavy, rumbling sound. Then a voice rose from the abyss, *the cry of light.* At once a quick-leaping flame darted forth from the humid depths, reaching to the ethereal heights. Hermes ascended with it, and found himself again in the expanse of space. Order began to clear up chaos in the abyss ; choruses of constellations spread above his head and *the voice of light* filled infinity.

" Dost thou understand what thou hast seen ? " said Osiris to Hermes, bound down in his dream and suspended between earth and sky.

" No," said Hermes.

" Thou wilt now learn. Thou hast just seen what exists from all eternity. The light thou didst first see is the divine intelligence which contains all things in potentiality, enclosing the models of all beings. The darkness in which thou wast afterwards plunged is the material world on which the men of earth live. But the fire thou didst behold shooting forth from the depths, is the divine Word. God is the Father, the Word is the son, and their union is Life."

" What marvellous sense has opened out to me ? " asked Hermes. " I no longer see with the eyes of the body, but with those of the spirit. How has that come to pass ? "

"Child of dust," replied Osiris, "it is because the Word is in thee. That in thee which hears, sees, and acts is the Word itself, the sacred fire, the creative utterance!"

"Since things are so," said Hermes, "grant that I may see the light of the worlds; the path of souls from which man comes and to which he returns."

"Be it done according to thy desire."

Hermes became heavier than a stone and fell through space like a meteorite. Finally he reached the summit of a mountain. It was night, the earth was gloomy and deserted, and his limbs seemed as heavy as iron.

"Raise thine eyes and look!" said the voice of Osiris.

Then Hermes saw a wonderful sight. The starry heavens, stretching through infinite space, enveloped him with seven luminous spheres. In one glance, Hermes saw the seven heavens stretching above his head, tier upon tier, like seven transparent and concentric globes, the sidereal centre of which he now occupied. The Milky Way formed the girdle of the last. In each sphere there rolled a planet accompanied by a Genius of different form, sign, and light. Whilst Hermes, dazzled by the sight, was contemplating their wide-spread efflorescence and majestic movements, the voice said to him:

"Look, listen, and understand. Thou seest the seven spheres of all life. Through them is accomplished the fall and ascent of souls. The seven Genii are the seven rays of the Word-Light. Each of them commands one sphere of the Spirit, one phase of the life of souls. The one nearest to thee is the Genius of the Moon, with his disquieting smile and crown of silver sickle. He presides over births and deaths, sets free souls from bodies and draws them into his ray. Above him, pale Mercury points out the path to ascending or descending souls with his caduceus, which contains all Knowledge. Higher still, shining Venus holds the mirror of Love, in which souls forget and recognise themselves in turn. Above her, the Genius of the Sun raises the triumphal torch of eternal Beauty. At a yet loftier height, Mars brandishes the sword of Justice. Enthroned on the azure sphere, Jupiter holds the sceptre of supreme power, which is divine Intelligence. At the boundaries of the world, beneath the signs of the Zodiac, Saturn bears the globe of universal wisdom."[1]

[1] It is unnecessary to state that these Gods bore other names in the Egyptian tongue. The seven cosmogonic Gods, however, correspond with one another in all mythologies, in meaning and attributes. They have their common root in the ancient esoteric tradition. As the western tradition has adopted the Latin names, we keep to them for greater clearness.

"I see," said Hermes, "the seven regions which comprise the visible and invisible world; I see the seven rays of the Word-Light, of the one God who traverses them and governs them by these rays. Still, O master, how does mankind journey through all these worlds?"

"Dost thou see," said Osiris, "a luminous seed fall from the regions of the Milky Way into the seventh sphere? These are germs of souls. They live like faint vapours in the region of Saturn, gay and free from care, knowing not their own happiness. On falling from sphere to sphere, however, they put on increasingly heavier envelopes. In each incarnation they acquire a new corporeal sense, in harmony with the surroundings in which they are living. Their vital energy increases, but in proportion as they enter into denser bodies they lose the memory of their celestial origin. Thus is effected the fall of souls which come from the divine Ether. Ever more and more captivated by matter and intoxicated by life, they fling themselves like a rain of fire, with quiverings of voluptuous delight, through the regions of Grief, Love, and Death, right into their earthly prison where thou thyself lamentest, held down by the fiery centre of the earth, and where divine life appears to thee nothing more than an empty dream."

"Can souls die?" asked Hermes.

"Yes," replied the voice of Osiris, "many perish in the fatal descent. The soul is the daughter of heaven, and its journey is a test. If it loses the memory of its origin, in its unbridled love of matter, the divine spark which was in it and which might have become more brilliant than a star, returns to the ethereal region, a lifeless atom, and the soul disaggregates in the vortex of gross elements."

Hermes shuddered at these words, for a raging tempest enveloped him in a black mist. The seven spheres disappeared beneath dense vapours. In them he saw human spectres, uttering strange cries, carried off and torn by phantoms of monsters and animals, amidst nameless groans and blasphemies.

"Such is the destiny," said Osiris, "of souls irremediably base and evil. Their torture finishes only with their destruction, which includes the loss of all consciousness. The vapours are now dispersing, the seven spheres reappear beneath the firmament. Look on this side. Do you see this swarm of souls trying to mount once more to the lunar regions? Some are beaten back to earth like eddies of birds beneath the might of the tempest. The rest with mighty wings reach the upper sphere, which draws them with it as it rotates. Once they have come to this sphere, they recover their vision

of divine things. This time, however, they are not content to reflect them in the dream of a powerless happiness; they become impregnated thereby with the lucidity of a grief-enlightened consciousness, the energy of a will acquired through struggle and strife. They become luminous, for they possess the divine in themselves and radiate it in their acts. Strengthen therefore thy soul, O Hermes! calm thy darkened mind by contemplating these distant flights of souls which mount the seven spheres and are scattered about therein like sheaves of sparks. Thou also canst follow them, but a strong will it needs to rise. Look how they swarm and form into divine choruses. Each places itself beneath its favourite Genius. The most beautiful dwell in the solar region; the most powerful rise to Saturn. Some ascend to the Father, powers themselves amidst the powers. For where everything ends, everything eternally begins; and the seven spheres say together: 'Wisdom! Love! Justice! Beauty! Splendour! Knowledge! Immortality!'"

"This," said the hierophant, "is what ancient Hermes saw and what his successors have handed down to us. The words of the wise are like the seven notes of the lyre which contain all music, along with the numbers and the laws of the universe. The vision of Hermes resembles the starry heaven,

whose unfathomable depths are strewn with constellations. For the child this is nothing more than a gold-studded vault, for the sage it is boundless space in which worlds revolve, with their wonderful rhythms and cadences. This vision contains the eternal numbers, evoking signs and magic keys. The more thou learnest to contemplate and understand it, the farther thou shalt see its limits extend, for the same organic law governs all worlds."

The prophet of the temple commented on the sacred text. He explained that the doctrine of the Word-Light represents divinity *in the static condition,* in its perfect balance. He showed its triple nature, which is at once intelligence, force, and matter; spirit, soul, and body; light, word, and life. Essence, manifestation, and substance are three terms which take each other for granted. Their union constitutes the divine and intellectual principle *par excellence,* the law of the ternary unity which governs creation from above downwards.

Having thus led his disciple to the ideal centre of the universe, the generating principle of Being, the master spread him abroad in time and space in a multiple efflorescence. For the second part of the vision represents divinity *in the dynamic condition, i.e.* in active evolution; in other terms, the visible and invisible universe, the living heavens.

The seven spheres attached to the seven planets symbolise seven principles, seven different states of matter and spirit, seven different worlds which each man and each humanity are forced to pass through in their evolution across a solar system. The seven Genii or the seven cosmogonic Gods signify the superior, directing spirits of all spheres, the offspring themselves of inevitable evolution. To an initiate of old, therefore, each great God was the symbol and patron of legions of spirits which reproduced his type in a thousand varieties, and which, from their own sphere, could exercise their action over mankind and terrestrial things. The seven Genii of the vision of Hermes are the seven Devas of India, the seven Amshapands of Persia, the seven great Angels of Chaldæa, the seven Sephiroths [1] of the Kabbala, the seven Archangels of the Christian Apocalypse. The great septenary which enfolds the universe does not vibrate in the seven colours of the rainbow and the seven notes of the scale, only; it also manifests itself in the constitution of man, which is triple in essence, but sevenfold in its evolution.[2]

[1] There are ten Sephiroths in the Kabbala. The first three represent the divine ternary, the seven others the evolution of the universe.

[2] We will here give the Egyptian terms of this septenary constitution of man, found in the Kabbala: *Chat*, material body; *Anch*, vital force; *Kan*, etheric double or astral body; *Hati*,

"Thus," said the hierophant in conclusion, "thou hast reached the very threshold of the great arcanum. The divine life has appeared to thee beneath the phantoms of reality. Hermes has unfolded to thee the invisible heavens, the light of Osiris, the hidden God of the universe who breathes in millions of souls and animates thereby the wandering globes and working bodies. It is now thine to direct thy path and choose the road leading to the pure Spirit. Henceforth dost thou belong *to those who have been brought back from death to life*. Remember that there are two main keys to knowledge. This is the first: "The without is like the within of things; the small is like the large; there is only one law and he who works is One. In the divine economy, there is nothing either great or small." And this is the second: "Men are mortal gods and gods are immortal men." Happy the man who understands these words, for he holds the key to all things. Remember that the law of mystery veils the great truth. Total knowledge can be revealed only to our brethren who have gone

animal soul; *Bai*, rational soul; *Cheybi*, spiritual soul; *Kou*, divine spirit; correspond to the *δαίμονες*, *ἡρωές* or *ψυχαι ἄχραντοι* of the Greeks.

The development of these fundamental ideas of the esoteric teaching will be found in the book of *Orpheus*, and more especially in that of *Pythagoras*.

through the same trials as ourselves. Truth must be measured according to intelligence; it must be veiled from the feeble, whom it would madden, and concealed from the wicked, who are capable of seizing only its fragments, which they would turn into weapons of destruction. Keep it in thy heart and let it speak through thy work. Knowledge will be thy might, faith thy sword, and silence thy armour that cannot be broken."

The revelations of the prophet of Ammon-Rā, which opened out to the new initiate such vast horizons over himself and over the universe, doubtless produced a profound impression, when uttered from the observatory of a Theban temple, in the clear calm of an Egyptian night. The pylons, the white roofs and terraces of the temples lay asleep at his feet between the dark clusters of nopals and tamarind trees. Away in the distance were large monolithic shrines, colossal statues of the gods, seated like incorruptible judges on their silent lake. Three pyramids, geometrical figures of the tetragram and of the sacred septenary, could be dimly seen on the horizon, their triangles clearly outlined in the light grey air. The unfathomable firmament was studded with stars. With what a strange gaze he looked at those constellations which were depicted to him as future dwellings! When finally the gold-

tipped barque of the moon rose above the dark mirror of the Nile which died away on the horizon, like a long bluish serpent, the neophyte believed he saw the barque of Isis floating over the river of souls which it carries off towards the sun of Osiris. He remembered *the Book of the Dead*, and the meaning of all the symbols was now unveiled to his mind after what he had seen and learned; he might believe himself to be in the crepuscular kingdom of the Amenti, the mysterious interregnum between the earthly and the heavenly life, where the departed, who are at first without eyes and power of utterance, by degrees regain sight and voice. He too was about to undertake the great journey, the journey of the infinite, through worlds and existences. Hermes had already absolved him and judged him to be worthy. He had given him the explanation of the great enigma: "One only soul, the great soul of the All, by dividing itself out, has given birth to all the souls that struggle throughout the universe." Armed with the mighty secret, he entered the barque of Isis. Rising aloft into the ether, it floated in the interstellar regions. The broad rays of a far-spreading dawn were already piercing the azure veils of the celestial horizons, and the choir of the glorious spirits, the Akhimou-Sekou, who have attained to eternal

repose, was chanting: "Rise, Rā Hermakouti, Sun of spirits! Those in thy barque are in exaltation. They raise exclamations in *the barque of millions of years*. The great divine cycle overflows with joy when glorifying the mighty sacred barque. Rejoicing is taking place in the mysterious chapel. Rise, Ammon-Rā Hermakouti, thou self-creating Sun!" And the initiate replied proudly: "I have attained the country of truth and justification. I rise from the dead as a living God, and shine forth in the choir of the Gods who dwell in heaven, for I belong to their race."

Such audacious thoughts and hopes might haunt the spirit of the adept during the night following the mystic ceremony of resurrection. The following morning, in the avenues of the temple, beneath the blinding light, that night seemed to him no more than a dream . . . though how impossible to forget . . . that first voyage into the intangible and invisible! Once again he read the inscription on the statue of Isis: "My veil no mortal hand hath raised." All the same a corner of the veil was raised, but only to fall back again, and he woke up on the earth of tombs. Ah, how far he was from the goal he had dreamed of! For the voyage on *the barque of millions of years* is a long one! But at least he had caught a faint glimpse of his

final destination. Even though his vision of the other world were only a dream, a childish outline of his imagination, still obscured by the mists of earth, could he doubt that other consciousness he had felt being born in him, that mysterious *double*, that celestial ego which had appeared to him in its astral beauty like a living form and spoken to him in his sleep? Was this a sister-soul, was it his Genius, or only a reflection of his inmost spirit, a vision of his future being dimly foreshadowed? A wonder and a mystery! Surely it was a reality, and if that soul was only his own, it was the true one. What would he not do to recover it? Were he to live millions of years he would never forget that divine hour in which he had seen his other self, so pure and radiant.[1]

The initiation was at an end, and the adept consecrated as priest of Osiris. If he was an Egyptian, he remained attached to the temple; if a foreigner, he was permitted, from time to time, to return to his own country, therein to establish the worship of Isis or to accomplish a mission.

[1] In the Egyptian teachings, man was considered in this life to have consciousness only of the animal and the rational soul, called *hati* and *baï*. The higher part of his being, the spiritual soul and the divine being, *cheybi* and *kou*, exist in him as unconscious germs and develop after this life, when he becomes himself *an Osiris*.

Before leaving, however, he swore a formidable oath that he would maintain absolute silence regarding the secrets of the temple. Never would he betray to a single person what he had seen or heard, never would he reveal the doctrine of Osiris except under the triple veil of the mythological symbols or of the mysteries. Were he to violate this oath, sudden death would come to him, sooner or later, however far away he might be. Silence, however, had become the buckler of his might.

On returning to the shores of Ionia, to the turbulent town in which he formerly lived, amidst that multitude of men, a prey to mad passions, who exist like fools in their ignorance of themselves, his thoughts often flew back to Egypt and the pyramids, to the temple of Ammon-Rā. Then the dream of the crypt came back to memory. And just as the lotus, in that distant land, spreads out its petals on the waves of the Nile, so this white vision floated above the slimy, turbulent stream of this life. At chosen hours, he would hear *its* voice, and it was the voice of light. Arousing throughout his being the strains of an inner music, it said to him: "The soul is a veiled light. When neglected, it flickers and dies out, but when it is fed with the holy oil of love, it shines forth like an immortal lamp."

PLATO

(THE MYSTERIES OF ELEUSIS)

Men have called Love Eros, because he has wings; the Gods have called him Pteros, because he has the virtue of giving wings.

Plato ("The Banquet").

In heaven, to learn is to see;
On earth, it is to remember.

Happy he who has passed through the Mysteries;
He knows the origin and the end of life.

Pindar.

PLATO

After attempting to revive in Pythagoras the greatest of the initiates of Greece, and through him the primordial and universal basis of religious and philosophical truth, we might dispense with any mention of Plato, who confined himself to giving this truth a more imaginative and popular form. This, however, is the very reason why we shall stop for a moment to consider the noble Athenian philosopher.

Yes, there is a mother-doctrine, a synthesis of religions and philosophies. It develops and deepens as the ages roll along, but its foundation and centre remain the same. We have gone over the main lines of this doctrine, but is that sufficient? No; we have still to show the providential reasons for its different forms, according to race and time. We must re-establish the chain of the great initiates, who were the real initiators of humanity. Then, the might of each of them will be multiplied by that of all the rest, and the unity of truth will appear in the very diversity of its expression.

Like everything in nature, Greece has had her dawn, the full blaze of her sun, and her decline. Such is the law of days, of men, and nations, of earths and heavens. Orpheus is the initiate of the dawn, Pythagoras the initiate of the full daylight, and Plato that of the setting sun of Greece, a setting of glowing purple which becomes the rose of a new dawn, the dawn of humanity. Plato follows Pythagoras, just as the torch-bearer followed the great hierophant in the mysteries of Eleusis. With him we shall now travel once more, along a fresh path, through the avenues of the sanctuary, right to the heart of the temple, there to behold the great arcanum.

Before proceeding to Eleusis, however, let us listen for a moment to our guide, the divine Plato. Let him show us his own natal horizon, relate to us the story of his soul, and lead us to the feet of his beloved master.

CHAPTER I

THE YOUTH OF PLATO AND THE DEATH OF SOCRATES

PLATO was born in Athens, that city of beauty and humanity. His youthful vision encountered no obstacle or limit. Attica, exposed to every wind, projects into the Ægean Sea, like the prow of a vessel, and queens it over the cycle of isles, lying there like white sirens on the dark blue waves. He grew up at the feet of the Acropolis, beneath the guardianship of Pallas Athena, in that wide plain enclosed within violet mountains and enveloped in a luminous azure, a plain situated between marble-flanked Pentelichus, pine-crested Hymettus, the sweet-smelling home of bees, and the peaceful bay of Eleusis.

Dark and troubled, in contrast, was the political horizon during Plato's childhood and youth. This was the period of that implacable Peloponnesian war, the fratricidal struggle between Athens and Sparta which led to the overthrow of Greece. The mighty days of the Medic wars had vanished; the suns of Marathon and Salamis had set. The year

of Plato's birth (429 B.C.) marked that of the death of Pericles, the greatest statesman of Greece, as upright as Aristides and as able as Themistocles, the most perfect representative of Hellenic civilisation, capable of swaying and guiding that turbulent democracy—an ardent patriot, though calm as a demi-god—in the midst of a popular upheaval. Plato's mother must have related to her son a scene at which she had certainly been present, two years before the birth of the future philosopher. The Spartans had invaded Attica; Athens, whose national existence was already threatened, had struggled a whole winter, Pericles being the soul of its defence. In the course of that gloomy year, an imposing ceremony took place at the Ceramicus. The coffins of the warriors who had died for their country were placed on funeral chariots, and the people summoned to the monumental tomb destined to receive them. This mausoleum seemed to be the magnificent though sinister symbol of the tomb Greece was digging for herself, in her criminal struggle. It was then that Pericles pronounced the finest speech antiquity has preserved for us. Thucydides transcribed it on his tablets, as enduring as brass, and the following sentence shines forth like a shield on the pediment of a temple: "The whole universe is the tomb of heroes, not columns

covered with pompous inscriptions." In such a sentiment, do we not see breathing the very consciousness of Greece and of her immortality?

But when Pericles died, what remained alive of ancient Greece in her men of action? Inside Athens, the discord of a demagogy at bay; outside, the Lacedæmonian invasion ever at the gates, war by land and sea, and all the time the gold of the King of Persia circulating like a corrupting poison in the hands of the tribunes and magistrates. Alcibiades had replaced Pericles in popular favour. This type of the gilded youth of Athens had become the man of the hour. Rash politician and seductive intriguer as he was, he led his country to ruin, with a smile on his lips. Plato had observed him carefully, for later on he gave a masterly psychological description of his character. He compared the mad desire for power which filled the soul of Alcibiades to a large-winged hornet-drone, "round which the passions, crowned with flowers, perfumed with essences and intoxicated with wine and all those unbridled pleasures which follow in their train, come buzzing, nourishing and rearing it, and finally arming it with the spur of ambition. Then this tyrant of the soul, with madness as his escort, stirs about furiously; if he finds about him honest thoughts and sentiments still capable of

feeling shame, he drives them away and kills them, until he has cleansed the soul of all temperance and filled it with the madness he has brought."

So we see that the sky of Athens was considerably clouded during the youth of Plato. At the age of twenty-five, he was present at the capture of Athens by the Spartans, after the disastrous naval battle of Ægospotami. Then he witnessed the entrance of Lysander into his native town, indicating the end of Athenian independence. He saw the long walls built by Themistocles thrown down to the sound of festival music, and the enemy literally dancing in triumph over the ruins of his country. Then came the Thirty Tyrants and their proscriptions.

These sights saddened the youthful soul of Plato, though they could not unsettle it, for it was as clear and open as the vault of heaven above the Acropolis. Plato was a tall, broad-shouldered young man, grave and reserved, scarcely ever speaking, though when he did open his mouth, an exquisite, charming gentleness seemed to characterise his words. There was nothing striking or extravagant in him. His various aptitudes were concealed, as though they had dissolved into the higher harmony of his being. The serious bent of his mind was hidden by a winged grace and natural modesty, whilst an almost feminine tenderness

served to veil the firmness of his character. In him, virtue clothed itself with a smile and pleasure with an ingenuous chastity. But what formed the dominant, the extraordinary, and unique characteristic of this soul was the fact that, at birth, it seemed to have concluded a mysterious pact with Eternity. Only things that were eternal seemed living in the depths of his great eyes, other things passed by like unsubstantial forms in a profound mirror. Behind the visible, changing, imperfect forms of the world and of the beings in it, there appeared to him the invisible, perfect forms eternally shining forth, of these same beings, which the spirit sees and which are the eternal models of the others. And so we see that the youthful Plato, without formulating his doctrine or even knowing that some day he would be a philosopher, was already conscious of the divine reality of the Ideal and of its omnipresence. As he saw the women, the funeral chariots, the armies and *fêtes* and the mourning, his looks seemed to behold something else and to ask: "Why do they weep, why do they raise shouts of joy? They believe they are and yet they are not. Why cannot I attach myself to that which is born, to that which dies? Wherefore can I love nothing but the Invisible, which is never born and which never dies, but which always is?"

Love and Harmony are the foundation of Plato's soul, but his Love and Beauty are eternal, his Harmony, that which enfolds the universe. The more mighty and profound a soul, the longer it takes to know itself. His first outbursts of enthusiasm spent themselves in art. He was of noble lineage, for his father alleged that he was descended from King Codrus, and his mother from Solon. Consequently his youthful days were those of a rich Athenian, surrounded by every luxury and all the seductions of a period of decadence. He gave himself up to them without either excess or prudishness, living the same life as his companions, in the noble enjoyment of a fine inheritance, and surrounded and fêted by numerous friends. In his *Phædrus*, he has too well described the passion of love in all its phases, not to have personally experienced its keen transports and cruel disillusions. We have a single line of poetry from him, as passionate as a line by Sappho, and radiant as a starry night on the sea of the Cyclades: "Would I were Heaven itself; all eyes, to behold thee!" Searching for the supremely beautiful through every mode and form of beauty, he studied painting, music, and poetry in turn. The last of these seemed as though it would respond to all his needs and finally determine his desires. Plato had a wonderful facility

for every kind of poetry ; he felt with equal intensity amorous and dithyrambic poetry, the epopee, tragedy, and comedy even in its subtlest form. Why should he not become a second Sophocles and rescue the theatre of Athens from imminent downfall ? This ambition tempted him, and his friends encouraged him in the idea. At the age of twenty-seven he had written several tragedies and was about to offer one for competition.

It was about this time that Plato met Socrates, who was discussing with some youths in the gardens of the Academy. He was speaking about the Just and the Unjust, the Beautiful, the Good, and the True. The poet drew near to the philosopher, listened to him, and returned on the morrow and for several days afterwards. At the end of a few weeks, his mind had undergone a complete revolution ; the happy youth, the poet full of illusions, no longer recognised himself. Not only the trend of his ideas, but the very object of his life had changed. Another Plato had been born in him, as he listened to the words of the one who called himself "the one who brings souls to birth." What had happened ? By what spell had this satyr-faced reasoner torn the handsome, talented Plato away from his voluptuous luxury and poetry, and converted him to wisdom's great renunciation ?

This good-natured Socrates was a simple fellow, though very eccentric. Son of a statuary, he sculptured the three Graces in his youth; then he flung away his chisel, saying that he preferred to carve his soul rather than marble. From that moment, he gave up his whole life to the search of wisdom. He might be met with in the gymnasia, on the public square, at the theatre, talking to young men, artists, philosophers, asking each of them the reason for whatever he affirmed. For several years past, the sophists had beaten down on Athens like a cloud of locusts. The sophist is the counterfeit and living negation of the philosopher, just as the demagogue is the counterfeit of the statesman, the hypocrite of the priest, and the black magician the infernal counterfeit of the real initiate. The Greek type of the sophist is more subtle, more reasoning and corrosive than the rest, but as a class they belong to all decadent civilisations. Here sophists swarm, as fatally as do worms in a body in a state of decomposition. Whether they call themselves atheists, nihilists, or pessimists, sophists of all times resemble one another. They always deny God and the Soul, that is to say, supreme Truth and Life. Those contemporary with Socrates, like Gorgias, Prodicus, and Protagoras, said that there was no difference between

truth and error. They prided themselves on proving any idea whatsoever and its contrary, affirming that there is no other justice than might, no other truth than the opinion of the subject. With all this they were self-satisfied, lovers of good cheer, and charged very high prices for their lessons. They also incited the youth of Athens to debauchery, intrigue, and tyranny.

Socrates approached sophists with insinuating gentleness and innocence, as though he were an ignorant man, desirous of learning. His eyes shone with benevolent intelligence. Then, from question to question he forced them to say the contrary of what they had first affirmed, and actually to confess that they did not even know that of which they spoke. Then he demonstrated that the sophists knew the cause and origin of nothing, though they pretended to be in possession of universal knowledge. After silencing them in this way, he did not triumph in his victory, but smilingly thanked his opponents for the information he had obtained from their replies, adding that the beginning of true wisdom consists in knowing that one knows nothing. What did Socrates himself believe and affirm? He did not deny the gods; he even worshipped them like the rest of his fellow-citizens, though he said that their nature was impenetrable. He con-

fessed also that he understood nothing of the physics and metaphysics taught in the schools. The important thing, he said, was to believe in the Just and the True, and to apply them to life. His arguments were very powerful, for he was a living example of them : an irreproachable citizen, a bold soldier, an upright judge, a faithful, disinterested friend, and absolutely master of every passion.

Thus do the tactics of moral education change according to time and environment. Pythagoras, in the presence of initiate disciples, brought ethics home to them in his teaching of cosmogony, whilst in the public square at Athens, before men like Cleon and Gorgias, Socrates spoke of the innate sentiment of the Just and the True, in order to reconstruct the world and the shattered social order. Both of them, the one in the descending, the other in the ascending order of principles, affirmed the same truth. Pythagoras represents the principles and method of the loftiest initiation ; Socrates proclaims the era of open science. That he might still preserve his *rôle* as popular exponent, he refused to become initiated into the mysteries of Eleusis. None the less, however, was he possessed of the signification and faith of the total, supreme truth taught by the great Mysteries. When

speaking of them, his face changed in expression like that of an inspired, god-possessed Faun. His eyes flashed, his countenance became transfigured, and from his lips there fell one of those simple luminous sentences which reveal the bases of things.

Why was Plato irresistibly charmed and subjugated by this man? When he saw him, he understood the superiority of the Good over the Beautiful. For the Beautiful realises the True only in the mirage of Art, whilst the Good is accomplished in the depths of the soul. Rare and powerful is the fascination, for the senses have no part in it. The sight of a really just man caused the dazzling splendours of visible art to pale away in Plato's soul, there to give place to a diviner dream.

This man showed him the inferiority of beauty and glory as he had conceived them hitherto, in comparison with the beauty and glory of the soul in action, which attracts, for ever, other souls to its truth; whilst the pomp of Art succeeds only in causing a deceptive truth to be reflected beneath an illusive veil. This radiant, eternal Beauty, "the Shining of the True," killed the changing, deceptive beauty which was in Plato's soul. This is the reason Plato, forgetting and leaving all he

had hitherto loved, gave himself with all the poetry of his soul to Socrates in the flower of his youth. A great victory of Truth over Beauty, big with incalculable consequences in the history of the human mind.

Plato's friends, all the same, expected to see him make his *début* in poetry on the tragic stage. He invited them to a great feast at his house, and all were amazed at his desire to give this *fête* at such a time, for it was the custom to give one only after having obtained the prize and when the winning tragedy had been played. No one, however, refused an invitation sent out by this rich youth, in whose home the Muses and the Graces met together in the company of Eros. His house had long served as a meeting-place for the elegant youth of Athens. Plato spent a fortune on this feast. The table was laid out in the garden, whilst youths, torch in hand, afforded light for the guests. The most beautiful courtezans of Athens were present, and feasting was carried on throughout the night. Hymns were chanted to Love and Bacchus. Female flute-players danced their most voluptuous dances. Finally, they requested Plato to recite one of his own dithyrambs. Rising to his feet with a smile, he said: "This feast is the last I shall ever give you. From this day onward, I renounce the

pleasures of life to consecrate myself to wisdom and to follow the teachings of Socrates. Be it known to all of you that I even renounce poetry, for I have recognised how powerless it is to express the truth I am following after. I will not write another line, but will now burn in your presence all I have composed." A cry of mingled astonishment and protest rose from every one round the table, where the guests, crowned with roses, were reclining on sumptuous couches. Some expressed surprise, others indignation, written clearly on countenances flushed with wine and gay conversation. The sophists present and the men about town indulged in laughs of incredulity and scorn. Plato's idea was regarded as both mad and sacrilegious, and he was requested to withdraw what he had said. He repeated his determination, however, in tones of calm assurance which permitted of no reply, and concluded with the words: "I thank all of you who have been good enough to join in this farewell *fête*, but I shall now keep by my side only such as are willing to share my new life. The friends of Socrates shall henceforth be my friends and those only." These words passed like a blighting frost over a meadow of flowers. They suddenly gave these ruddy expansive countenances the sad, embarrassed looks of men present at a funeral ceremony. The

courtezans rose to their feet, and, with looks of vexation at the master of the house, were carried off in their litters. The sophists and elegant fops slunk away, saying in tones of mingled irony and sprightliness: "Farewell, Plato! Be happy! Thou wilt come back to us! Farewell! Farewell!" Two serious-minded youths alone remained behind. Those faithful friends he took by the hand, and, leaving the half-emptied amphoras of wine, the roses with their leaves scattered about, and the lyres and flutes lying in disorder among goblets filled with wine, Plato led the way to the inner court of the house. There, piled on a small altar, they saw a pyramid of papyrus rolls. These consisted of the whole of the poetical works of Plato. Taking up a torch, the poet set fire to them, smiling as he uttered the words: "Vulcan, come hither! Plato hath need of thee." [1]

When the flames had died away, and the last flicker was over, the friends, with tears in their eyes, silently bade farewell to their future master. Plato, however, who was left alone, did not weep, for wonderful peace and serenity filled his entire being. He was thinking of Socrates whom he was

[1] Fragment of the complete works of Plato, preserved under the title: "Plato burning his poems."

going to see. The rising dawn cast its radiance over the terraces of the houses, the colonnades and pediments of the temples ; and soon the helmet of Minerva shone with the sun's first beam on the top of the Acropolis.

CHAPTER II

THE INITIATION OF PLATO AND THE PLATONIC PHILOSOPHY

THREE years after Plato had become the disciple of Socrates, the latter was condemned to death by the Areopagus, and died by drinking the hemlock, surrounded by his disciples.

Few historical events are so well known as this, and there are few whose causes and effects have been so badly understood. At the present day it is held that the Areopagus was in the right to condemn Socrates as an enemy of the State religion, because, in denying the gods, he was undermining the foundations of the Athenian Republic. We shall shortly show that this assertion contains two profound errors. Let us first call to mind what Victor Cousin has had the courage to write at the head of the *Apology of Socrates*, in his fine translation of Plato's works: "Anytus, it must be stated, was a citizen worthy of commendation; the Areopagus, a just and dispassionate tribunal; and

the only thing one may wonder at, is that Socrates was accused so late in the day, and that he was not condemned by a larger majority." The philosopher, a Minister of Education, did not see that, if he was right, they should also have condemned philosophy and religion, solely for the sake of the glorification of a policy of lying, violence, and absolutism. For if philosophy necessarily overthrows the foundations of the social condition, it is nothing but pompous madness, and if religion cannot exist except by suppressing the search after truth, it is nothing less than a fatal tyranny. Let us try to be more just towards both Greek religion and Greek philosophy.

There is one important and striking fact which has escaped the notice of most modern historians and philosophers. Persecution in Greece, very rare against philosophers, was never begun in the temples, but was always the work of politicians. Hellenic civilisation has known nothing of that war between priests and philosophers, which has played so great a part in our civilisation, ever since the destruction of Christian esotericism in the second century of our era. Thales might quietly state that the world comes from water; Heraclitus that it springs from fire; Anaxagoras might say that the sun is a mass of incandescent fire, and Democritus

claim that everything springs from atoms: no temple suffered uneasiness. In the temples they knew all that and much more beside. They also knew that the would-be philosophers who denied the gods could not destroy them in the national consciousness, and that real philosophers believed in them after the fashion of the initiates, and saw in them the symbols of the mighty categories of the spiritual hierarchy, of the Divine which penetrates all Nature, and of the Invisible which governs the Visible. The esoteric doctrine accordingly served as a bond between true philosophy and true religion. This is the profound, the primordial and final fact which explains their secret meaning in Hellenic civilisation.

Who then accused Socrates? The priests of Eleusis, who had uttered maledictions on those who had stirred up the Peloponnesian War, shaking the dust of their robes towards the west, did not utter a single word against him. The temple of Delphi gave him the finest testimony that could be paid to any man. The Pythoness, on being consulted as to what Apollo thought of Socrates, replied: "There is no man living who is more reasonable, free, or just."[1] The two main accusations therefore brought against Socrates: that he corrupted

[1] Xenophon: *Apology of Socrates.*

the youth, and did not believe in the gods, were only a pretext. On the second charge, the accused victoriously answered his judges: "I believe in my familiar spirit; how much more then must I believe in the gods, who are the great spirits of the universe?" Then why was there such implacable hatred against the sage? He had combated injustice, unmasked hypocrisy, exposed the falsehood of so many vain claims. Men excuse all vices and atheisms except those which unmask themselves. This was why the real atheists, sitting at the Areopagus, brought about the death of the just and innocent man, by accusing him of the crime they were committing. In his admirable defence, reproduced by Plato, Socrates explains this himself with perfect simplicity: "It is my fruitless search for wise men amongst the Athenians, that has roused against me so much dangerous hostility; hence all the slanders spread abroad regarding me, for those who hear me believe that I know all those things regarding which I unmask the ignorance of others. . . . An active and numerous body of intriguers, speaking about me according to an arranged plan and with the most seductive eloquence, have long filled your ears with the most perfidious reports and unceasingly followed up their system of calumny. To-day, they have

weaned from me Melitus, Anytus, and Lycon. Melitus represents the poets, Anytus the politicians and artists, and Lycon the orators." A tragic poet, devoid of talent, a wicked fanatical man of wealth, and a shameless demagogue, succeeded in obtaining sentence of death against the best man living. This death has immortalised him. He could proudly say to his judges : " I believe more in the gods than do any of my accusers. It is time to depart, I to die, and you to live. Which is the better, God alone knows." [1]

Far from shattering true religion and its national symbols, Socrates had done everything possible to strengthen them. Could his country have understood him, he would have been its greatest strength and stay. Like Jesus, he died uttering words of pardon on his murderers, and became the model of martyr sages for the whole of humanity ; for he represents the definite advent of individual initiation and open science.

The serene spectacle of Socrates dying for the sake of truth, and spending his last hour in conversing with his disciples on the immortality of the soul, sank deep into Plato's heart. To him it was the most beautiful and holy of mysteries, his first great initiation. Later in life, he was to study

[1] Plato : *Apology of Socrates.*

physics, metaphysics, and many other sciences, but he ever remained the disciple of Socrates. He has bequeathed us the living image of the latter by putting the treasures of his own thought into the mouth of his master. This flower of modesty makes of him the disciple's ideal, just as the fire of enthusiasm shows him to us as the poet of philosophers. It avails us nothing to know that he founded his school only when fifty years old, and died at the age of eighty: we cannot imagine him as anything else than young, for eternal youth is the portion of those souls which unite divine candour with profundity of thought.

Plato had received from Socrates the great impulse, the active male principle of his life, his faith in justice and truth. He was indebted for the science and substance of his ideas to his initiation into the Mysteries, and his genius consists in the new form, at once poetic and dialectic, he was enabled to give to them. He did not receive this initiation from Eleusis alone, but sought for it from every accessible source. After the death of Socrates, he travelled about. He attended the lessons of several philosophers in Asia Minor. Then he went to Egypt, to come into touch with its priests and go through the initiation of Isis. He did not reach, as did Pythagoras, the highest stage,

at which one becomes an adept and acquires an effective and direct vision of divine truth, with supernatural powers, from an earthly standpoint. He stopped at the third stage, which confers perfect intellectual clearness, along with the dominion of the intellect over soul and body. Then he went to southern Italy to enter into communication with the followers of Pythagoras, well knowing that Pythagoras had been the greatest sage of Greece. He paid an enormous price for one of the master's manuscripts. After thus obtaining from its very source the esoteric tradition of Socrates, he borrowed from this philosopher his main ideas, and the framework of his system.[1]

On returning to Athens, Plato founded his school, which remained so famous under the name of the Academy. Truth must be spread abroad if he wished to continue the work of Socrates. Plato, however, could not publicly teach what the Pythagoreans covered with a triple veil. Prudence,

[1] "What Orpheus promulgated in obscure allegories," says Proclus, "Pythagoras taught, after being initiated into the Orphic mysteries, and Plato had full knowledge of it from Orphic and Pythagorean writings." This opinion of the Alexandrian School regarding the filiation of the Platonic ideas, is fully confirmed by the comparative study of the Orphic and Pythagorean traditions, and the writings of Plato. This filiation, kept secret for centuries, was revealed only by the Alexandrian philosophers, for they were the first to make known the esoteric meaning of the Mysteries.

his oaths, and the very end he had in view all forbade this. It is indeed the esoteric doctrine we find in his *Dialogues*, though dissembled and mitigated, travestied in legends, myths or parables. Here it no longer appears with that imposing *ensemble* Pythagoras gave to it, and which we have attempted to reconstitute, an edifice founded on an immutable basis, and all of whose parts are firmly cemented together, though in analytical fragments. Plato, like Socrates, places himself on the same territory as the gay youths of Athens, the rhetoricians and sophists. He fights them with their own weapons. His genius is never absent, however, for every moment he breaks the network of dialectics, like an eagle, to mount, in bold flight, to those sublime truths which form his native atmosphere and his real fatherland. These dialogues have a piquant charm, all their own ; in them are found not only the enthusiasm of Delphi and Eleusis, but also wonderful clearness and Attic wit, the archness of the simple-minded Socrates, and the delicate, winged irony of the sage.

Nothing is easier than to recognise the different parts of the esoteric doctrine in Plato and at the same time to discover the sources from which he has obtained them. The doctrine of the idea-types of things, as set forth in *Phædrus*, is a corollary

to the doctrine of the *Sacred Numbers* of Pythagoras.[1] The *Timæus* gives a very confused and obscure account of esoteric cosmogony. The doctrine of the soul, its migrations and evolution, traverses the whole work of Plato, though nowhere does it appear so clearly as in *The Banquet*, in *Phædo*, and in *The Legend of Er* in the last book of *The Republic*. We perceive Psyche under a veil, but how touching is her beauty, with its exquisite form and divine grace, as she shines through it!

In Pythagoras, it is seen that the key of the Kosmos, the secret of its constitution throughout, is found in the principle of *the three worlds*, reflected by the microcosm and the macrocosm in the human and divine ternary. Pythagoras had formulated and summed up this doctrine in masterly fashion under the symbol of the *Sacred Tetrad*. This doctrine of the living eternal Word, constituted the great arcanum, the source of magic, the diamond temple of the initiate, his impregnable citadel above the ocean of things. In his public teaching, Plato neither could nor would reveal this arcanum. First, the oath of the mysteries closed his mouth, and secondly, all would not have understood; the common people would unworthily have profaned this theogonic mystery, which contains the generation of the

[1] See a fuller exposition of this doctrine in *Pythagoras*.

worlds. Something else was needed to combat the corruption of morals and the mad unbridling of political passions. The gate of the beyond was soon about to close, with the great initiation, that gate which brings light only to mighty prophets, to real initiates.

Plato replaced the doctrine of the three worlds by three concepts which, in the absence of organised initiation, remained for two thousand years, three paths leading to the same final goal. These three concepts refer alike to the human and the divine world; they possess the advantage of uniting them, though in abstract fashion. Here is manifested the popularising and creative genius of Plato. He shed torrents of light over the world, setting the ideas of the True, the Beautiful, and the Good on the same line. Throwing light on one by means of the other, he showed that they are three rays starting from the same centre, and that the same rays, when they meet one another, reconstitute this very centre, that is to say, God.

In following after the Good, that is to say, the Just, the soul is purified, it prepares itself to know Truth. This is the first, the indispensable condition of its progress. In following after and enlarging the idea of the Beautiful, it attains to the intellectually Beautiful, that intelligible light, the

mother of things, animating all forms, the substance and organ of God. As it plunges into the soul of the world, the human soul acquires for itself wings. In following after the idea of the True, it attains to pure Essence, the principles contained in pure Spirit. It recognises its immortality through the identity of its principle with the divine principle, Perfection; the epiphany of the soul.

When he opened up these great paths to the human mind, Plato defined and created, outside of narrow systems and particular religions, *the category of the Ideal*, which was to replace for centuries, and still does, a complete *organic initiation*. He prepared the three sacred paths which lead to God, just as the sacred way of Athens led to Eleusis through the gate of Ceramicus. Having penetrated into the interior of the temple with Hermes, Orpheus, and Pythagoras, we are better enabled to judge as to the solidity and the soundness of these wide roads laid down by the divine engineer, Plato. The knowledge of Initiation gives us the justification and the *raison d'être* of Idealism.

Idealism is the bold affirmation of divine truths by the soul, which questions itself in its solitude and judges of celestial realities by its inmost faculties and inner voices. *Initiation* is the penetration of

these truths by the experience of the soul, the direct vision of the spirit, the inner resurrection. In the highest degree, it is the bringing of the soul into communication with the divine world.

The Ideal is a morality, a poetry, and a philosophy; *Initiation* is an action, a vision, the sublime presence of Truth. The Ideal is the dream and the regret of the divine father-land; Initiation, that temple of the elect, is its distinct remembrance; its very possession.

Plato, accordingly, when building up the category of the Ideal, created a refuge, opened up a way of salvation to millions of souls who cannot, in this lifetime, attain to direct initiation, but painfully aspire after truth. He thus made philosophy the vestibule of a future sanctuary, inviting thereto all such as were seriously minded. The idealism of his numerous pagan or Christian sons appears to us the waiting-room, so to speak, of the great initiation.

This explains the immense popularity and the far-reaching influence of Plato's ideas. Their power lies in their esoteric basis. This is the reason the Academy of Athens, founded by Plato, lasted for centuries and extended into the mighty school of Alexandria; this is why the first Fathers of the Church paid homage to Plato and why Saint Augustine took from him two-thirds of his theology.

Two thousand years had passed since the disciple of Socrates had breathed his last sigh beneath the shadow of the Acropolis. Christianity, barbarian invasions, the Middle Ages had passed over the world. Antiquity, however, was rising again from her ashes. In Florence the Medicis wished to found an Academy, and summoned a Greek servant, an exile from Constantinople, to organise it. And what name did Marsile Ficin give it? He called it the Platonic Academy. Even in these days, after so many philosophic systems, built upon one another, have crumbled to dust, when science has reduced matter to its final transformations and finds itself face to face with the inexplicable and the invisible, Plato has again returned to us. Ever simple and modest, though radiant with eternal youth, he holds out to us the sacred branch of the Mysteries, the branch of myrtle and of cypress along with the narcissus: the *soul-flower* which promises divine rebirth in a new Eleusis.

CHAPTER III

THE MYSTERIES OF ELEUSIS

In Greek and Latin antiquity, the Eleusinian mysteries formed the object of special veneration. Those very authors who turned into ridicule the mythological fables dared not attack the cult of the "great goddesses." Their reign, whilst less boisterous than that of the Olympians, showed itself to be more certain and efficacious. In times immemorial, a Greek colony from Egypt had brought the cult of the great Isis into the peaceful bay of Eleusis, under the name of Demeter, or the universal mother. From that time, Eleusis had remained a centre of initiation.

Demeter and her daughter Persephone presided over the lesser and the greater mysteries; hence the prestige they acquired.

Whilst the people revered in Ceres the mother earth and the goddess of agriculture, the initiates saw in her, celestial light, the mother of souls; and divine Intelligence, the mother of the cosmogonic gods. Her cult was served by priests belonging to

the most ancient sacerdotal family in Attica. They called themselves sons of the Moon, that is to say, born to be mediators between Earth and Heaven, and sprung from the sphere where the bridge is projected between the two regions, the bridge along which souls ascend and descend. From the first, it had been their function "to sing, or chant, in that abyss of misery, the delights of the heavenly abode, and to teach the methods enabling one to regain the path." Hence their name, Eumolpidæ, "chanters of beneficent melodies," gentle regenerators of men. The priests of Eleusis always taught the great esoteric doctrine which came to them from Egypt. As time passed, they invested it with all the charm of a ravishing, plastic mythology. With subtle, profound art, those enchanters were able to make use of earthly passions, in order to express celestial ideas. They put to profit, sense attraction, ceremonial pomp, and the seductiveness of art, to bring the soul to a better life and the mind to a knowledge of divine truth. Nowhere did the mysteries appear beneath a form so human, so living and coloured.

The myth of Ceres and of her daughter Proserpine formed the heart of the cult of Eleusis.[1] The whole of the Eleusinian initiation turns and develops, like

[1] See the Homeric hymn to Demeter.

a shining procession, around this luminous circle. Now, in its inmost signification, this myth is the symbolical representation of the history of the soul, its descent into matter, its sufferings in the darkness of forgetfulness, and then its ascent and return to divine life. In other words, it is the drama of the Fall and the Redemption, in its Hellenic form.

It may accordingly be affirmed, on the other hand, that, to the cultured Athenian initiate of the time of Plato, the mysteries of Eleusis offered the explanatory complement, the luminous counterpart of the tragic performances in Athens. There, in the theatre of Bacchus, before the roaring masses of people, the terrible incantations of Melpomene summoned forth the inhabitant of earth, blinded by his passions, pursued by the Nemesis of his crimes, and overwhelmed by an implacable and often incomprehensible Destiny. And there, too, could be seen and heard the Promethean struggles, the imprecations of the Furies, the despair of Œdipus, and the madness of Orestes. This also was the abode of gloomy terror and rueful pity. At Eleusis, in the hall of Ceres, everything was filled with light; the circle of things extended for the initiates who had become seers. For each soul, the history of Psyche-Persephone was a surprising

revelation. Life was explained either as an expiation or as a test. Both beyond and on this side of his earthly present, man discovered the starry zones of a divine future and past. After the terrors of death came hope and liberation, Elysian joys; through the porticoes of the wide-open temple passed the chants of the blessed, the submerging light of a marvellous beyond.

Such were the Mysteries in the presence of Tragedy: the divine drama of the soul completing and explaining the terrestrial drama of man.

The Lesser Mysteries were celebrated in the month of February, at Agrae, near Athens. Candidates who had passed a preliminary examination, and given proofs of their birth, education, and honour, were received at the entrance to the sacred enclosure by the priest of Eleusis named the *hieroceryx*, or sacred herald, resembling Hermes, with the petasus on his head and the caduceus in his hand. He was the guide, the mediator, and interpreter of the Mysteries, and conducted the new-comers to a small temple, with Ionic columns, dedicated to *Korē*, the great Virgin, Persephone. The graceful sanctuary of the goddess lay hidden in the depths of a peaceful vale, surrounded by a sacred wood between groups of yew-trees and white poplars. Then the priestesses of Proserpine, the hiero-

phantids, left the temple, each wearing an immaculate peplus, with bare arms and heads wreathed in narcissus blooms. They stood in a line at the top of the stairs, and struck up a solemn chant in Doric fashion :

" Oh ! candidates of the Mysteries, you have now reached the threshold of Proserpine. All you are now about to see will surprise you. You will learn that your present life is nothing but a tissue of lying and confused dreams. The sleep, which surrounds you with a zone of darkness, carries off your dreams and days in its flow like floating *débris* which vanish before human sight. Beyond, a zone of eternal light extends. May Proserpine be propitious to you and teach you, herself, to cross the river of darkness and advance right to the celestial Demeter."

Then the prophantid, or prophetess who led the choir, descended three steps of the staircase and uttered the following malediction in solemn tones and with terrifying look : " Woe be to such as have come to profane the Mysteries ! The goddess will pursue such perverse hearts during the whole of their lifetime, and in the kingdom of the shades she will not let go her prey ! "

Afterwards, several days were spent in fasting, ablutions, and prayers.

On the evening of the final day, the neophytes assembled in the most secret part of the sacred wood, there to assist at *the rape of Persephone*. The scene was played in the open air, by the priestesses of the temple. This custom dated from far back, and the basis of this performance, as well as its main idea, remained always the same, though its form varied greatly throughout the course of the ages. In Plato's time, owing to the recent development of tragedy, the former hieratic severity had given place to a more humane and refined taste and to a tendency in which passion played a large part. Guided by the hierophant, the anonymous poets of Eleusis had made of this scene a short drama which ran somewhat as follows :

(*The neophytes, in couples, reach a glade. In the background may be seen rocks and a grotto, surrounded by a wood of myrtles and poplars. In front, a meadow, with nymphs reclining about a fountain. At the far end of the grotto is seated* Persephone, *naked to the girdle, like a Psyche, her graceful bust chastely emerging from flowing drapery, wrapped round her like an azure vapour. She seems to be happy, quite unconscious of her beauty, and is embroidering a long veil of many-coloured threads.* Demeter *her mother stands by her side, sceptre in hand and kalathos on her head.*)

Hermes (*the herald of the Mysteries to the spectators*). Demeter offers us two excellent gifts: the fruits of the earth, that we may not live like the beasts of the fields, and initiation, which gives a sweeter hope to those who participate in it both for the end of this life and for all eternity. Give heed to the words you are about to hear and the things you are now to see.

Demeter (*in solemn accents*). Beloved daughter of the gods, remain in this grotto and embroider my veil until I return. Heaven is thy father-land and the universe is thine. Thou seest the gods; they come to thy call. Listen not to the voice of Eros, the cunning one, with his mild eyes and treacherous counsel. Beware of leaving the grotto or gathering the seductive flowers of earth; their fatal distracting perfume would make thee lose the light of heaven and even the memory of it. Weave my veil and live happily with thy companions, the nymphs, until my return. Then I will take thee in my chariot of fire, drawn by serpents, right into the splendour of the Ether, above the Milky Way.

Persephone. August and redoubtable mother, by this surrounding light so dear to me, I promise it. May the gods punish me, if I keep not my oath. (*Exit* Demeter.)

Chorus of Nymphs. O Persephone! Virgin!

Chaste bride of Heaven, thou who embroiderest the faces of the gods on thy veil, mayst thou never know the empty illusions and countless evils of earth. Eternal Truth smiles on thee and Dionysus, thy celestial spouse, awaits thee in the Empyrean. At times he appears to thee in the form of a distant sun; his rays play about thee; he breathes thy breath and thou drinkest in his light. . . . Already do ye possess one another . . . O Virgin! Who is happier than thou?

Persephone. On this azure veil, with its interminable folds, I work the innumerable forms of beings and of all things with my ivory needle. I have finished the history of the gods and embroidered horrible Chaos, with his hundred heads and thousand arms, whence mortal beings must issue. Then who has given them birth? The Father of the Gods told me that it was Eros, though I have never seen him; I know not his appearance. Who will depict me his face?

The Nymphs. Think not of that. Wherefore this vain question?

Persephone (*rising and flinging aside the veil*). Eros! The most ancient and yet the youngest of the gods, inexhaustible spring of joys and tears—for this have I been told of thee—thou terrible god, alone unknown and invisible of Immortals, and

alone desirable, mysterious Eros! With what a giddy terror thy name fills me!

The Chorus. Seek not to learn more. Dangerous questions have proved the downfall of men and even of gods.

Persephone (*her terror-stricken eyes gazing into the void*). Is it a past memory, or a frightful presentiment? Chaos . . . men . . . the birth-cries . . . the mad clamour of hatred and war . . . the abyss of death! I see and hear it all, and the deep calls to me. I must descend. Eros, with his flaming torch, plunges me therein. Ah! I am dying! Away from me, this horrible dream! (*Covering her face with her hands, she bursts into sobs.*)

The Chorus. Oh! Divine virgin, this is yet but a dream, though it would take on a body and become inevitable reality, and thy heaven would disappear like an empty dream, wert thou to yield to thy guilty desire. Obey this salutary warning, take up thy needle once more and weave thy veil. Forget cunning Eros, impudent, criminal Eros!

Persephone (*removes her hands from her face, which has changed expression; she smiles through her tears*). How mad you are, and how insensate I was! Now, I remember, I heard in the Olympian Mysteries that Eros is the most beautiful of the

gods; seated on a winged chariot he presides over the evolutions of the Immortals, over the blending of the initial essences. It is he who conducts the bold and heroic from the depths of Chaos to the heights of the Ether. He knows all; like the Fire-Principle, he passes through all worlds and he keeps the keys of earth and heaven! I will see him!

The Chorus. Unhappy maiden! Stop!

Eros (*issues from the wood in the form of a winged youth*). Dost thou call me, Persephone? Here I am.

Persephone (*sitting down again*). They say thou art cunning, though thy face is innocence itself; all-powerful, though thou resemblest a feeble child; treacherous, and yet the more I look into thine eyes, the more my heart overflows with confidence in thee, thou pretty, playful child. They say thou art knowing and skilful; canst thou help me to embroider this veil?

Eros. Willingly; I will sit at thy feet. What a wonderful veil! It appears as though it had been plunged into the azure of thine eyes. What wonderful shapes thine hand has embroidered thereon! though less beautiful than the divine embroiderer who has never seen herself in a mirror. (*He smiles roguishly.*)

Persephone. See myself! Would that be pos-

sible? (*She blushes.*) Dost thou recognise these forms?

Eros. Recognise them! It is the history of the gods. But wherefore stop at Chaos? That is where the struggle begins. Wilt thou not weave the war with the Titans, the birth of men and their loves?

Persephone. My knowledge stops here, my memory fails. Wilt thou help me to embroider the rest?

Eros (*gives her a burning glance*). I will, Persephone, on one condition. Thou must come with me to gather a flower in the meadow, the most beautiful of them all!

Persephone (*serious*). My venerable, wise mother has forbidden me to do that. "Do not listen to the voice of Eros," she said. "Do not gather the flowers in the meadow. If thou disobeyest me, thou wilt be the most wretched of Immortals!"

Eros. I understand. Thy mother will not have thee learn the secrets of earth and hell. Wert thou to breathe the flowers of the meadow, they would be revealed to thee.

Persephone. Dost thou know them?

Eros. I know them all, and, as thou seest, I am only the more youthful and active in consequence. O, daughter of the gods, the abyss has terrors and horrors which heaven knows nothing of, but he

cannot understand heaven who has not passed through earth and hell.

Persephone. Wilt thou enable me to understand them?

Eros. Yes. Look! (*He touches the ground with the end of his bow; a large narcissus appears.*)

Persephone. What a beautiful flower! It brings back a divine memory, trembling and stirring in my heart. Sometimes when asleep on a peak of my beloved star, gilded with the glory of an eternal sunset, on awaking I have seen, above the purple horizon, a silvery star floating in the pearly bosom of the pale green sky. To me it then seemed as the torch of the immortal spouse, the promise of the gods, divine Dionysus. But the star went down . . . down . . . and the light died away in the distance. This wonderful flower resembles that star.

Eros. I who transform and unite all things, who make the small in the likeness of the great, and of the watery deep the mirror of heaven, who mingle heaven and hell on earth and work out all forms in the depths of the ocean, I have brought back to life thy star from the abyss in the form of a flower, that thou mayst touch and smell as well as pluck it.

The Chorus. Beware lest this magic be a snare!

Persephone. What is the name of this flower ?

Eros. Men call it the narcissus ; I call it Desire. See how it looks at you and turns in your direction. Its white petals quiver as though they were alive ; from its golden heart there escapes a perfume which fills the whole atmosphere with voluptuous pleasure. When thou raisest this magical flower to thy face, in one wonderful and immense picture thou wilt behold the monsters of the abyss, the depths of the earth, and the hearts of men. Nothing will be hidden from thee.

Persephone. O marvellous flower, of enrapturing odour, how my heart beats and my fingers burn as I seize hold of thee. I will breathe thy perfume, I will press thee to my lips and place thee on my heart—though I were to die for it !

(*The ground by her side half opens. From the dark, gaping fissure,* Pluto *is seen slowly rising, seated in a chariot drawn by two black horses. The moment* Persephone *plucks the flower, he seizes her and pulls her violently to his side. In vain does she writhe in his arms, raising a loud cry. The chariot immediately sinks and disappears. The rolling wheels die away in the distance, like subterranean thunder. Groaning and wailing, the nymphs scatter about the wood.* Eros *laughingly makes his escape.*)

The Voice of Persephone (under the earth). O! Mother! Help! Help!

Hermes. O Candidates of the Mysteries, whose lives are still clouded over with the fumes of an evil life, such is your history. Remember and meditate on what Empedocles says: "Generation is a terrible destruction which causes the living to pass into the dead. Formerly you lived the true life, then drawn by a charm, you fell into the terrestrial abyss, subdued by the body. Your present is nothing but a fatal dream, the past and the future alone really exist. Learn to remember and to see ahead."

. . . . . .

During this scene, night had fallen, funeral torches were lit between the black cypresses, near the entrance to the small temple, and the spectators silently departed, followed by the wailing chants of the hierophantids, calling: "Persephone! Persephone!" The Lesser Mysteries were at an end. The neophytes had become *mustai*, that is to say, *veiled ones*. They were going to return to their usual occupations, but the great veil of the Mysteries was spread over their eyes. A cloud had intervened between them and the outer world. At the same time there had opened in their mind an inner eye through which they dimly perceived another world

filled with attractive forms, which moved about in the abysmal depths of alternate light and darkness.

The *Greater Mysteries* which followed, and which were also called the *Sacred Orgies*, were only celebrated once every five years, at Eleusis.

The symbolical *fêtes* lasted nine days; on the eighth, the tokens of initiation were distributed to the *mustai*; these consisted of the thyrsus and a basket called a cist, surrounded with ivy leaves. This latter contained mysterious objects, the knowledge of which was to give the secret of life. The basket itself was carefully sealed; it could be opened only at the end of the initiation and in the presence of the hierophant.

Then they abandoned themselves to a state of exultant joy, waved flaming torches in the air, and handed them to one another. That same day, the statue of Dionysus, wreathed with myrtle-leaves, and which was called Iacchos, was carried in procession from Athens to Eleusis. Its arrival at Eleusis proclaimed the great renascence, for it represented the divine spirit penetrating all things, the regenerator of souls, the mediator between earth and heaven.

This time they entered the temple through the mystic door, there to spend the sacred night, or the night of initiation.

First, they entered a large portico in the outer enclosure. There the herald, with terrible threats and crying aloud: "*Eskato Bebeloi!* Away, ye profane!" drove from the spot such intruders as succeeded sometimes in stealthily gliding into the enclosure along with the *mustai*. The latter were made to swear, under penalty of death, that they would reveal nothing they saw. He added: "You have now come to the subterranean threshold of Persephone. To understand the future life and your present condition, the kingdom of death must have been traversed; that is the test of the initiates. To enjoy the light, you must be able to brave the darkness." Then they put on the fawn skin, symbol of the tearing asunder and the laceration of the soul, which has been plunged into bodily life. Finally they extinguished the torches and lamps and entered the subterranean labyrinth.

At first the *mustai* groped about in the darkness. Soon dreadful sounds were heard, noises and groans. The blackness was pierced by flashes of lightning accompanied with thunderclaps. By their light horrible visions were seen; sometimes a monster, a chimæra or a dragon, then a man writhing in the claws of a sphinx, or again a human larva. These apparitions were so sudden that there was not time to distinguish by what artifice they were produced,

and the utter darkness which followed doubled the horror of the situation. Plutarch likens the terror caused by these visions to the condition of a man on his deathbed.

The strangest scene of all, the one bordering on real magic, took place in a crypt where a Phrygian priest, clad in an Asiatic robe, with vertical stripes, red and black in colour, stood before a copper brazier, the flickering light from which dimly lit up the room. With commanding gesture, he forced all to sit down at the entrance, and flung into the brazier large handfuls of narcotic perfumes. The room was soon filled with thick clouds of smoke, and a disordered array of changing forms, both human and animal, could soon be distinguished. At times long serpents could be seen, stretching out into sirens, entangled in endless windings, then again voluptuously arched busts of nymphs, with outstretched arms, changed into bats; charming heads of youths melted away into dogs' muzzles. All these monsters, in turn beautiful and hideous, fluid and aëreal, deceptive and unreal, vanishing no sooner than they appeared, turned about in changing hues with vertiginous movements and crowded round the fascinated *mustai* as though to prevent their passage. From time to time the priest of Cybele extended his short wand right in the midst

of the vapours, and the effluvium of his will seemed to give the multiform circles a whirling motion and disturbed vitality. "Pass along!" said the Phrygian. The *mustai* rose and entered the circle. Most of them felt strange rustlings, others were rapidly touched by invisible hands or violently flung to the ground. Some drew back in terror and returned in the direction from which they had come. Only the boldest passed on, after several attempts, for a strong determination cut short the charm.[1]

. . . . . .

Then they reached a large circular hall through

[1] Contemporary science would see in these facts nothing but simple hallucinations or suggestions. The science of antique esoterism, however, attributed to this kind of phenomenon, which frequently happened in the Mysteries, a value at once subjective and objective. It believed in the existence of elementary spirits devoid of either reason or an individualised soul, semi-conscious, filling the terrestrial atmosphere, the souls of the elements, so to speak. Magic, which is really will power acting in the control of occult forces, makes them visible at times. It is of them that Heraclitus speaks when he says: "Nature is everywhere full of demons." Plato calls them "demons of the elements;" Paracelsus, "elementals." According to this theosophist doctor of the sixteenth century, they are attracted by the magnetic atmosphere of man, become electrified, and are then capable of assuming every shape imaginable. The more enslaved a man is to his passions, the more completely does he become their prey, without any suspicion of the fact. The magus alone tames and makes use of them. They constitute, however, a sphere of deceptive illusion and folly which must be mastered and overcome on one's entrance into the occult world. Bulwer Lytton called them "guardians of the threshold," in his curious novel, *Zanoni*.

which a few torches shed a ghastly light. In the centre stood a single column, a bronze tree whose metallic foliage extended over the whole ceiling.[1] In this foliage were inlaid figures of the chimæra and of the sphinx, owls and harpies and gorgons, speaking images of every terrestrial ill, of every demon that attacks mankind. These monsters, reproduced in shining metal, twine about the branches and seem to be watching their prey from above. On a magnificent throne at the foot of the tree sits Pluto-Aïdoneus, clad in a purple mantle. In his hand is a trident; an anxious look overcasts his brow. By the side of the king of the Infernal Regions, who never smiles, sits his bride, Persephone, tall and graceful. The *mustai* recognise in her the features of the hierophantid, who had already represented the goddess in the Lesser Mysteries. She is still as beautiful as ever, perhaps even more beautiful in her sadness, though how greatly changed beneath her golden diadem, in her mourning robe, with its silver tears. No longer is she the virgin of the Grotto; now she is acquainted with life below, and suffers in consequence. She reigns over the infernal powers, she is queen over the dead,

[1] This is the tree of dreams mentioned by Virgil in the descent of Æneas into the infernal regions in the Sixth Book of the *Æneid*, which reproduces the principal scenes of the Mysteries of Eleusis, with poetical amplifications.

though a stranger in her own empire. A pale smile illumines her face, overcast by the shadow of Hell. Ah! in that smile lies the knowledge of Good and of Evil, the inexpressible charm of a grief that has been felt and is now dumb. Suffering teaches pity; so she welcomes with looks of compassion the *mustai*, who kneel before her and lay wreaths of narcissus at her feet. Then there flashes from her eyes a dying flame, a lost hope, the distant memory of heaven!

Suddenly, at the end of an ascending passage, torches shine forth, and in trumpet tones a voice exclaims: "Welcome, *mustai!* Iacchos has returned! Demeter awaits her daughter. Evohé!" The sonorous subterranean echoes repeat the cry. Persephone sits upright on her throne, as though suddenly starting from a long sleep, under the impulse of a dazzling thought: "Light! Mother! Iacchos!" She makes a forward movement; but Aïdoneus gently touches the hem of her garment and she falls back, like a corpse, on to the throne. Then the torches suddenly flicker away and expire and a voice exclaims: "To die is to be born again!" The *mustai* press along the gallery of the heroes and the demi-gods, to the opening of the subterranean passage, where the Hermes and the torch-bearer await them. Their fawn skins are removed; clad

in fresh linen, they are sprinkled with lustral water, and conducted into the splendidly lit temple, where the hierophant, the high priest of Eleusis, a majestic old man, clothed in purple, receives them.

And now let us listen to Porphyrus, as he relates the supreme initiation of Eleusis :

" Wreathed in myrtle, we enter, along with the other initiates, into the vestibule of the temple, still blind, though the hierophant within will soon open our eyes. First, however—for we must do nothing hurriedly—let us lave ourselves in the sacred water, for it is with clean hands and a pure heart that we are invited to enter the sacred spot. Led before the hierophant, he reads to us from a stone book, things we must not divulge under the penalty of death. I may only say that they are in perfect harmony with the place and the circumstances. You would perhaps smile were you to hear them outside the temple, but here you have no inclination to smile as you listen to the words of the old man and look at the symbols revealed.[1] And you are far from smiling when Demeter confirms, in her special language and her signals, by

[1] The golden objects contained in the cist were : the pine-apple (the symbol of fecundity and of generation) ; the spiral serpent (universal evolution of the soul : fall into matter and redemption by the spirit) ; the egg, recalling the divine sphere or perfection, the aim and end of man.

vivid sparkling lights and clouds piled upon clouds, everything we have seen and heard from her sacred priest; finally the light of a serene wonder fills the temple, we see the shining Elysian fields; then it is not only by an external appearance or a philosophical interpretation, but in fact and reality that the hierophant becomes the creator (δημιουργός) and revealer of all things; the Sun is only his torch-bearer, the Moon, his officiating priest before the altar, and Hermes, his mystic herald. But the final word has been uttered: Konx Om Pax.[1]

The rite is now over, and we are Seers (ἐπόπται) for ever.

And then, what did the chief hierophant say? What sacred, supreme revelation had he to give?

The initiates learned that divine Persephone, whom they had seen in all the terror and punishment of the infernal regions, was the image of the human soul, chained to matter in this life, or given up in the next to even greater torments, if it has been

[1] These mysterious words have no meaning in Greek, proving at any rate that they are very ancient and come from the East. Wilford gives them a Sanscrit origin. *Konx*, from *Kansha*, signifies the object of the strongest desire; *Om*, from *Oum*, the soul of Brahma; and *Pax* from *Pasha*, turn, change, cycle. The final benediction of the hierophant of Eleusis accordingly meant: May thy desires be fulfilled; return to the universal soul!

living a slave to its passions. Its earth life is an expiation or a test of former existences. The soul, however, may purify itself by discipline; it may remember and foresee by the combined effort of reason, intuition, and will, and share beforehand in the great truths of which it must take full and entire possession in the immense beyond. Then only will Persephone become once more the ineffable Virgin, pure and light-giving, distributor of love and joy. Ceres, her mother in the Mysteries, was the symbol of divine Intelligence and of the intellectual principle in man, which the soul must rejoin, in order to attain to perfection.

If Plato, Iamblichus, Proclus, and all the Alexandrian philosophers are to be believed, the *élite* of the initiates had visions of a marvellous and ecstatic nature inside the temple. I have already quoted the testimony of Porphyry; listen now to that of Proclus: "In all initiations and mysteries, the gods (here this word means all orders of spirits) show many forms of themselves and appear in a great variety of shapes, sometimes in a formless light, then again the light assumes a human form, and at times a different one." [1] Hear the following passage from Apuleius: "I ap-

[1] Proclus: *Commentary on the Republic of Plato.*

proached the confines of death, and after reaching the threshold of Proserpine, I returned, borne along through all elements (elementary spirits of earth, water, air, and fire). In the midnight darkness I saw the sun beaming with radiant light and at the same time the lower and higher gods. As I drew near these divinities, I paid them the tribute of pious adoration."

Although such witness is vague and indefinite, it appears to refer to occult phenomena. According to the doctrine of the Mysteries the ecstatic visions of the temple were produced through the purest of elements: spiritual light assimilated to celestial Isis. The oracles of Zoroaster call it, Nature speaking by itself, that is to say, an element by which the Magus gives visible and instantaneous expression to thought and which serves alike as body and raiment for the souls which are the finest thoughts of God. This is the reason the hierophant, if he had power to produce this phenomenon, the bringing of initiates into relation with the souls of heroes and gods (angels and archangels), was at this time likened to the Creator, the Demiurgus; the Torch-bearer to the Sun, that is to say, to superphysical light; and the Hermes to the divine word which is his interpreter. Whatever these visions might have

been, antiquity is of one voice regarding the serene exaltation produced by the final revelations of Eleusis. A happiness hitherto unknown, peace beyond human power to bestow, entered the hearts of the initiates. Life seemed to have been conquered, the soul set free, and the redoubtable cycle of existences brought to completion. All met again with unalloyed joy and ineffable certainty in the pure ether of the universal soul.

We have just revived the drama of Eleusis, giving its inner, secret meaning. I have given some indication of the guiding thread leading through this labyrinth, and shown the great unity which dominates its complexity. In wise and sovereign harmony, a strict bond united the varied ceremonies to the divine drama, which formed the ideal centre, the luminous centre of these religious *fêtes*. In this way the initiates gradually identified themselves with action. From being simple spectators, they became actors, finally recognising that the drama of Persephone was being enacted within themselves. What joy and surprise there was in this discovery! If they suffered and struggled with her in this present life, like her they also had the hope of regaining divine felicity, the light of the great Intelligence. The words of the

hierophant, the scenes and revelations of the temple, had given them a foretaste of it all.

It goes without saying that each understood these things according to his degree of culture and intellectual capacity. For, as Plato says—and this is true for all time—few are the inspired, though many bear the thyrsus and the wand. After the time of Alexander, the Eleusinia were, to a certain extent, subjected to pagan decadence, but their sublime basis remained, saving them from the downfall which came over the other temples. By their profoundly sacred doctrines and the splendour of their presentation, the Mysteries held their own for three centuries against a rising Christianity. Then they brought together an *élite* of disciples, who, though not denying that Jesus was a manifestation of heroic and divine order, were unwilling to forget, as the Church of the day was already doing, the ancient science and sacred doctrine. An edict of Theodosius the Great, commanding that the temple of Eleusis be razed to the ground, was needed to bring to an end this august cult, in which the magic of Greek art had incorporated the loftiest teaching of Orpheus, Pythagoras, and Plato.

Nowadays, the refuge of Demeter of old has disappeared, leaving no trace behind, in the silent

Bay of Eleusis, and the butterfly alone, Psyche's winged insect, as it flits across the azure gulf in the warm days of spring, calls back to memory that here, in former times, the human Soul, the great Exile, evoked the gods and recognised her eternal home.

THE END

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